

Microcosm

Volume XV
Spring 1988



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Microcosm . . .

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Junior College holds a literary competition for college students and for area high school students. Selected college entries compete in the Mississippi Junior College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the high school division of 1988 competition include: poetry — the *Microcosm* staff, Durr Walker, Co-Lin, and Doris and Jim Bateman of Hazlehurst, MS; short fiction — the *Microcosm* staff and Sandra Cooper Pitts of Crystal Springs, MS; essay — the *Microcosm* staff, Sharon Alexander, Nancy Dykes and Evelyn Sutton, Co-Lin.

The judges for the college division of the 1988 competition include: poetry — Doris and Jim Bateman of Hazlehurst; short fiction and essay — Charles Thornton and James Beasley of Crystal Springs.

The English faculty: Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Evelyn Sutton, and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanities.

The administration of Copiah-Lincoln Junior College: Billy B. Thames, President; Howell Garner, Dean of Instruction; Jim Kyzar, Business Manager; Alton Ricks, Dean of Students; Russell Ray, Director of Student Development; and Burlan Walker, Director of Public Information.

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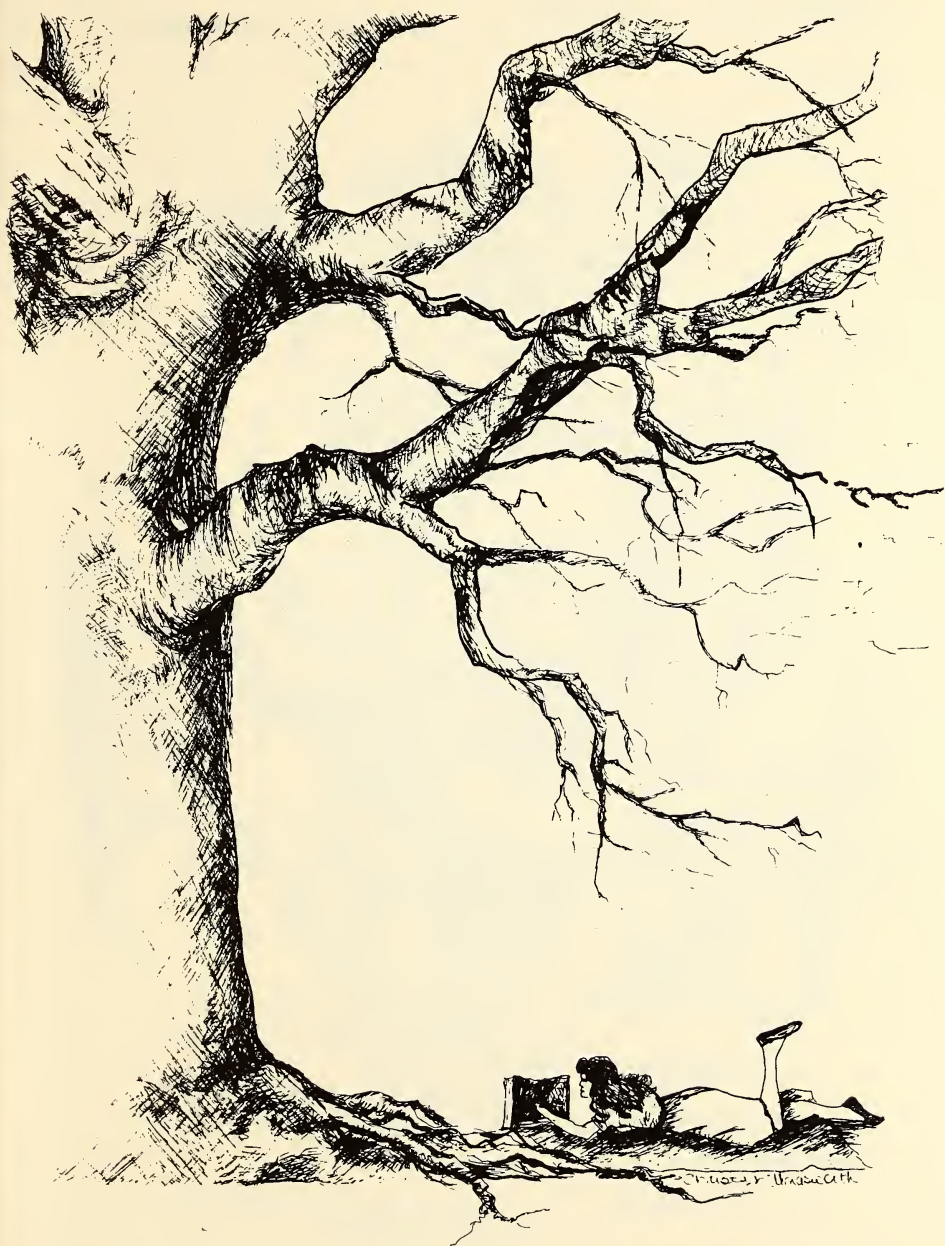
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The staff regrets that *The Challenge of American Citizenship*, by Reagan Brown, Wesson Attendance Center, and *Horsemanship — The Art of Riding*, by Dana Pennington, Brookhaven High School, could not be printed.

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*—first semester, **—second semester, ***—both semesters

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Copiah-Lincoln
Junior College
Wesson, Mississippi

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Fiction



CHRISTY KILLINGSWORTH

James Paul McInnis

It was strangely cool for an August night in South Mississippi so I cranked up my '79 LTD and let her idle for fifteen minutes or more as I stood arguing with the guys. The engine was coughing and clattering. I had gotten some bad gas down at the West Side Quick-Stop, but she clattered anyway. Over 160,000 miles. She had a right to clatter. Tommy wasn't ragging me about my car and her moans for an overhaul as he usually did. She didn't look that bad. I had even put a good Pioneer system in her which did well to cover the engine noise and she was a big improvement over the '67 Fairlane that I started out in, but she was getting old.

She has two dents both put in her by me. They aren't big but they are there. I remember well the first one. I got it the first time my parents let me drive to Jackson by myself. I promised Mama that I would be extra careful and would watch for the big trucks on I-20. I tried to fit her into a tight squeeze at Northpark to avoid walking a hundred miles. I didn't make it. But I never could judge distances. My eyes don't focus at the same point which is really weird. I could never catch anything thrown to me, and I could never get the full effect of 3-D movies either. The second dent was bigger but less painful. I was mad at the world and whipped out of the parking lot at the band hall and pegged a pole which I knew was there but had forgotten about. I hated it, but I got over it quick. Actually, there is a third dent in the hood. It will take longer to get over.

I left Tommy and the rest of the gang at the carwash and headed out—not for home or anywhere in particular; just out. I would meet Tommy later at the bridge. We had been talking about the world situation. But our world was in the bounds of Red Clay, the model of small town Mississippi. Exciting, fun, and full of activity. That's why we gathered at the carwash. Most of the guys drank but I didn't. They understood why though and Tommy never ragged me about that either. I always felt deep down that he probably understood why more than the rest of them did. But, he still drank. A lot of times I almost started using the same excuse they all did—What else was there to do?

Sometimes there were girls there, too. We weren't the undesirables of the local high school or anything like that. In fact, all of us were more-or-less popular. I was probably the least popular of the entire group but I wasn't friendless by any means. The nights that the girls weren't with us were usually our Donahue sessions. I don't think that you could repeat most of it on TV and we never had to worry about Phil sticking that demon mike down our throats. We mainly talked about the girls who weren't there.

Since it was a small town, most of us had been hurt by the same girls and had hurt the same girls. But in the end most of our class ended up being pretty tight despite all the hard times. Tommy and I were worst enemies at

one time. He said we had had a fight on the bus one day. He had gotten the best of me so when he stepped off the bus I leaned out the window and spit on him. He swore that he would get me back.

Tommy and I had gone through the hard times as friends. I don't know what I would have done without him sometimes. He was always there for me and I was always there for him. When I broke up with Becky, he was there. I was torn up. She was my first serious girlfriend. We had even been talking about marriage. We had the rest of our lives planned for each other and I just couldn't deal with the breakup. I almost started to join the rest of the guys in the drinking ritual. Tommy told me it wasn't worth it, but he still drank. I suppose he had his reasons. I loved Tommy anyway.

It's hard to say that sometimes nowadays about your male buddies without someone calling you a faggot or questioning your preferences. We talked about faggots all the time at the car wash. But we weren't as liberal as the weirdos on Donahue. We all went to church. I know all my buddies walked on the right side of the fence. Tommy was my friend and I loved him. I was closer to him than I was with my brother. I hardly ever saw my brother who was older than me and had gone off to the university, gotten married, and moved up to Little Rock.

So Tommy was my pal after we resolved the spitting incident. I don't remember why we were friends, but we were. Maybe it was destiny for us to be friends or something. I'm not really sure. I'm not sure about a lot of things anymore. I have had my problems, too. Tommy understood though or at least he did in time. Sometimes things still aren't clear. He was just there one day.

It was after our fight. They told me how long it was but I forget sometimes. I don't know why, but my doctor tells me that it's because I want to. Dad and I had been at a hunting camp. Mama told me to call before we left to make sure everything was O.K. I should have called and I hated myself later because I didn't. The doctor says that deep down I still do and that's why I have to keep on seeing him. I don't know. Like I said, some things still aren't clear to me. Dad had problems, too. He and his buddies always like to put down a few cold ones after the hunting was over. Mama told me to keep an eye on him and make sure he was safe. I didn't pay any attention to him though before we left. I was too busy talking to a daughter of one of the hunters. It was unusual to have girls at camp so I felt compelled to make the best of the situation.

I didn't realize the extent of his condition until after we had started home. It was too late then. His pride wasn't going to allow him to pull over and let me drive. I begged him to. We started arguing violently about it. I was scared. And Mama had asked me to watch after him. I kept on and the argument grew worse. I called him a worthless alcoholic. He turned toward me and started to slap me. His fist made contact with my jaw at the same in-

stant the truck did with the bridge railing. I had my seat-belt on because I was scared. Dad didn't. It didn't matter though. The bridge railing tore through him before his inertia could carry him through the windshield. God, it was horrible. I started to scream. I knew Dad was dead, I woke up and Tommy was there. The doctor, not the same one, said I was lucky. I had suffered very little besides a severe concussion that kept me out for three weeks.

Tommy was there and it was like we had always been friends. After I got out of the hospital, he kept coming by to see me at home and then helped me catch up with my school work. He drank but he wasn't stupid. He was a genius in algebra. He had a knack for that squaring stuff. But his genius went further. I'll never figure out how he got $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ in the equation of my life; it never worked out for me. I guess friends can do those sort of things for you. And I found out that I had more friends than I thought. Everybody had thought that I was going to die. The girls kept giving me more hugs than usual and Tommy told me that he had forgotten about the spitting incident. I had, too. But for real—I couldn't remember it. He told me all about it. That's how I know. I felt so silly. I couldn't believe that I had spit on him. So we were friends. Just in time for the hard times.

I got sick after the accident. The other doctor told my mother that it was some sort of psycho-neurotic thing. I'm not sure. He said I was repressing feelings and blaming myself for the wreck and was going through a post-traumatic-emotional disturbance. I couldn't deal with it—I lost a few more weeks of my life there. Tommy told me that I parked my car on the bridge and ran a hose from the muffler inside. He found me before the exhaust could kill me. I really didn't want to die or I can't remember wanting to. Tommy was there again like a friend should be.

They made me stay at Riverside for awhile. My friends didn't think that I was weird after I got out. They accepted it at face value and went on being my friends. Tommy caught me up again.

All of this happened my junior year. Over the summer Tommy and I fell in love. Not with each other. He met a girl from Simpson County and I met Becky. She had moved from Illinois. Her dad was a big shot manager at Wal-Mart. She was a knockout and so was Tommy's girl, Sharon. We were still friends but occupied with other interests.

When school started again, things moved more towards normal for Tommy and me. We still had our separate interests but we saw each other at school and were in band together. He didn't spend much time at the car-wash anymore on Saturday nights. He had to drive fifty miles to see Sharon. But he did come occasionally and we would fuss and discuss our small world. All was calm on the home front. Then came March.

Becky and I broke up over spring break. I didn't have a clue. She said that she had been considering it for a while. She had never mentioned it to

me though. So Tommy was there again for me. He even skipped going to see Sharon one weekend to take me out and cheer me up. He was such a pal. He worked at the Dairy Queen and got his friends there to give me the best of all the frozen treats. My favorite was the rootbeer freeze so he had them make one in the biggest cup they had which I refilled twice. I got sick later. I think I threw up all my vital organs. Tommy said that he would hate to see what real beer would do to me. But I felt better. Once again Tommy had pulled me through.

Tommy started changing toward the end of the year. He was always gone on Saturday nights and I assumed that he was going to see Sharon. I remember at our graduation party he got blitzed. He broke down and started crying and spilling his guts out to me. I don't think I got the whole story that night but the core of it was that he and Sharon were having problems. I tried to help him understand breaking up the way he had helped out me with Becky. I guess it's always harder to follow your own advice. I told him that things would get better.

That wasn't the first time that he had spilled his guts when he was drunk. I found out most about Tommy when he was drunk. He told me that he was adopted. He found out by accident. And then when he found out that his parents who weren't even real were getting divorced, he began to sink deeper in the bottle.

I was losing Tommy. I couldn't talk to him anymore. He understood that I hated his drinking, but he really couldn't do anything about it. He was caught by the heel just like Dad was. I saw that and it hurt even more. I wanted to help him so bad. He was my friend. My pal. I couldn't understand why he had always been able to help me and I couldn't do a thing for him. He told me so many times that he wanted to quit. He did. . . he was dry when I killed him.

I left the carwash and headed out toward the bridge taking the usual route and making the usual stops along the way. The bridge didn't upset me. I was dealing with that part of my life pretty good. It was just another meeting place. The county never fixed the railing and I tried hard not to notice it. Tommy and I spent countless hours on the bridge listening to Pink Floyd and talking about our problems. During the time that Tommy was dry I had even discussed how church was beginning to change my life. I had spent the early part of the summer with my brother in Arkansas. He got me involved again. I had been away from church a long time. I knew that Sharon was a "good" girl and I figured that may have been one of the reasons for Tommy's problems with her. I was finding a way out of my problems. I think that it was our bridge conversation that got Tommy to stop drinking as much or maybe for good. I was never clear on that point until today. Tommy had a religious experience once at a tent revival meeting. I

had an earlier experience, too. I didn't drink but I was far off the "straight and narrow."

We had also gotten into listening to Stryper, a Christian heavy metal band. I knew there was truth in the lyrics somewhere but I wasn't sure if Tommy felt the same way. We felt so good as they sang with all the power in the world "To Hell with the Devil." I was caught in a difficult situation when I tried to explain my graffiti on the bridge. I had painted in yellow and black the STRYPER logo and added emphatically under it in red KICKS ASS. Maybe my description was a little hypocritical.

We were listening to them that night at the carwash with the rest of the guys. We got into a big church debate. Most of the guys wanted to accuse everyone of being hypocrites. But, they would be in church with them the next morning as they always were regardless of what they had done on Saturday night. When you live in a small town, you have to go to church. People will talk if you don't. But for the first time I was really finding myself in a position of defense. I hadn't cared long enough to really know what I was talking about. Tommy didn't say much about it. He just sat there with his head immersed in the lyrics on the tape jacket. He couldn't work me out of this one. But he didn't disagree with what little I could say. I knew that I was not very convincing and cranked my car up to signal that I was about to take the easy way out of the now heated discussion.

About that time, Sharon pulled up and all discussions ceased. The guys knew about Tommy's situation and for his sake we became silent. Whatever she had to say must have been important for her to make the drive over. She called him over to her car. They exchanged a few words and then she left. I couldn't detect the tone of the conversation. Tommy didn't say a word to any of us and ran to his truck throwing the tape jacket to me as he ran by. I dropped it, naturally, and the case shattered on the asphalt. As I stooped and picked up the pieces, I thought I saw a smile behind the glass as he left the carwash.

I left the unfinished argument and went up town and got a burger and shake. I cruised the graveyard and took a few back roads and then decided to head out to the bridge. I never could see that good at night but I just wasn't expecting what happened to happen. I never saw his truck parked on the roadside or anything. He was just suddenly there. I didn't figure out why until today. I wasn't going that fast, maybe fifty, but it killed him just the same. He jumped up from nowhere right in the middle of the bridge. I was lost in a train of thought.

I had the Floyd pulled full throttle. I was thinking about my old car and all of the things that had revolved around it and all of the miles I had put on it. The first dent was at 157760. The second came around 159900. In between those two at 158491 I parked her one night on the bridge and Tommy found me. Then I can never forget 159643 when I drove up to the pipeline

the first time with Becky. So much of my life started and stopped with this car. I wonder if they could arrest me if they knew I was actually looking at the odometer at the time I hit him. It had just turned to 160558.

I looked up and there he was holding something in his hand. He flew through the windshield before my foot made it to the brake. Glass went all over me. For a brief second I was thinking about 3-D movies. I locked her up and managed to stay on the road. I didn't realize it was Tommy until I had stopped and looked at the massacred face and then recognized the clothes as the same he was wearing at the carwash. My heart stopped.

He wasn't dead as he lay twisted on my front seat. He was still conscious and I believe that his state of shock had removed most of the pain from his distorted body. He looked at me and said,

"I thought I recognized the engine. You really ought to get her fixed. I figured you would stop. Next time I'll move."

I couldn't say a thing. My shock was deeper than his.

"It's all settled, John, we worked things out just like you said. I'm so happy. They were right."

He was choking on blood. He tried to lean up, heaved violently and coughed up the bloody phlegm. The jerking force of his body threw most of it across my face. He looked at the sight and choked out with a broken smile, "That's for the bus thing. I never did get you back."

He died in my arms and Pink Floyd cranked out "Comfortably Numb." I punched the tape deck dead center and blew three knuckles and a year's worth of nickle and dime jobs.

I thought about his last words today as I walked across the bridge. Last words are supposed to be special and full of meaning. I suppose they were but I told his mom and dad that he said to tell them that he loved them. I told Sharon that he said the same about her. I really don't think they would have understood the blood, spit, and tears.

It's hard to understand the bridge; it has given and taken so much from me. I don't know if it is enemy or friend, but the countless sessions with psychologists have helped me to see that I can't always blame myself when things go wrong. Maybe the circumstances were out of my control. I will get by. All I have to do is bend over and pick up the pieces and put them together. I'm scared though. I have never finished a puzzle before. The closest I ever came was within one piece. The picture was awesome—a bridge silhouetted against an amber sunset. I loved it as my eyes ran down and across it. Then I saw the scar, the missing piece right at the corner of the bridge. I hated it and threw the 999 pieces across the room. Tommy was a friend though, he finished the puzzle.

The last piece is painted in red right above the still torn section of the bridge railing. It reads simply, "To Hell With the Devil — Tommy loves Sharon forev. . . ."

First Place, *Microcosm*

First Place, MJCCWA

Greebly

Amy White-Nations

"There's monsters under my bed, Mommy," said the frightened boy.

"There are no monsters under the beds of good little boys. Now be a good boy and go to sleep!" Mother turned off the lights and closed the door.

Tommy pulled the green comforter up closer to his ears, hiding as much as possible beneath his soft shield. Tommy spoke quietly to himself, "Are too monsters. Green and purple and yellow ones. All kinds of blobs and creepie crawlies. I can hear 'em and see their shadows on my walls. But I don't have to get up. If I put my foot or arm over, they'll grab me and bite me and get poisonous stuff in me and gobble me up."

"At least you believe I'm real. It's terrible to be ignored." A soft voice floated from under the bed.

Tommy didn't move or say anything.

"Please don't be frightened, I won't hurt you." The voice gently pleaded with him. "I'm lonely. Nobody will talk to me: they're scared of me or pretend I don't exist. Monsters don't have too many friends, you know.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Greebly, the green monster. I'm glad you're talking to me, I was afraid you wouldn't. What's your name?"

"Tommy," he whispered.

"Tommy. That's a nice name." Greebly was trying very hard to put Tommy at ease 'cause he really wanted a friend and he had heard that Tommy needed one too. "What are some of your favorite things, Tommy?"

Still a little cautious about having a real monster in his room, Tommy began to list some things he liked, after issuing a word of warning. "We have to be quiet or Mommy will get mad at me and she would think I was making you up anyway. I like chocolate ice cream with lots of syrup and whipped cream and cherries. And boomerangs. The baby animals 'cause they're soft. And chocolate chip cookies. And swings that are high. And slick slides. And see-saws. And lying in the grass looking at the cloud pictures." So many things rushed out at once that Tommy had to stop and catch his breath. His curiosity about Greebly now made him ask, "If you don't mind me asking, what kind of things do monsters like you like? I've never met a real monster before."

"Well, I don't mind you asking me; actually I was hoping you would ask 'cause I'm a different kind of monster. I like children. But to talk to and spend time with, not to gobble up. I'm sorry that I scared you before. It just took me a long time to get the courage up to talk to you. Bet you never heard of a shy monster before. I noticed you like food a lot; I don't really eat stuff like you do. I read. Anything I can. Nothing is so hard that I can't read it if I just take my time and concentrate. Reading is like food for thought. Without reading, my mind would starve and that would be the end of me! I

also like to drift among the clouds at night and talk to the man-in-the-moon and trace the stars. I collect dust-bunnies too, I'll show 'em to you some time if you want. I rest during the day usually." Greebly paused. "You know what?"

"What?"

"The flowers smell better at night. And you can hear frogs and crickets and katydids. I love to just sit and listen to whatever Mother Nature is saying. You'd be surprised what you hear once you learn how to listen." Greebly noticed the sleepy look in Tommy's eyes. "It's getting late. You should go to sleep."

"Greebly, don't leave. I don't want you to go."

"I'll come back tomorrow, if you want me to. Then you can tell me about day things."

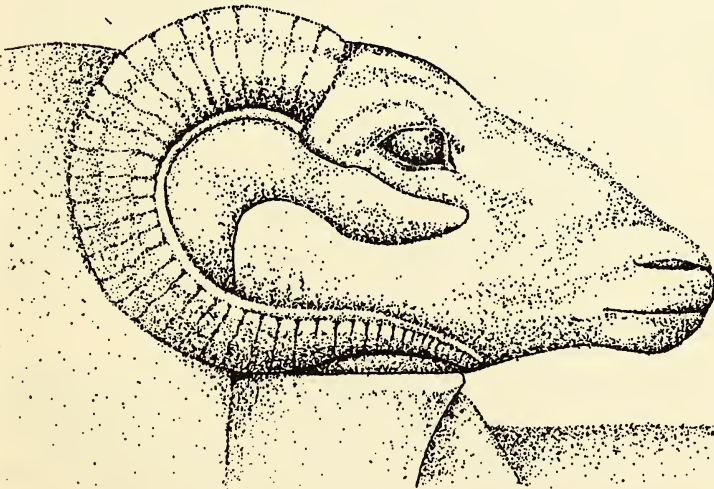
"I promise I'll learn how to listen. Please stay 'til I go to sleep."

"I'll stay, Tommy. Pleasant dreams."

An almost asleep voice murmured, "'Night, Greebly. I like you."

After Tommy drifted off to his dreams, Greebly drifted off to the clouds with a huge monster smile.

Second Place, *Microcosm*



SCOTT FALVEY

Possum Holler

Vicky Buitt

The girl waited eagerly for the rhythm of pebbles on her window, that blessed sound that sent chills down her spine every night about nine-thirty. Something was wrong though; he was late. "Could he have overlooked the time? Could he have fell in the creek and drowned?" But Lord no she thought, "Could he have run into Paw!" Finally she heard those joyous taps. Tap!... Tap! Tap!... Tap! It was Kevin Lane; he never failed to come. Their love was so strong, molasses in January couldn't stick them closer together.

Hurriedly she scampered to her window, sliding the portal of their love up with careful precaution. "Kevin Lane, is that you? Are ya out there?"

"Chrissy Belle, here I am. I'm over here by the huckleberry bush."

Softly she tip-toed downstairs and out the front door to the huckleberry bush where she found his loving gaze. "Paw musn't see us. He could be madder than an ol' wet hen."

"But I love you, Chrissy Belle, with all my heart. Marry me."

"Oh, Kevin Lane, I'd be proud to." Just then rustling sounds came from their weathered barn across the dimly lit yard. Their worst fears became reality: it was her father. He had just come from putting up Bessy, their old, but faithful, grey mare.

Like a streak of vibrant lightning Kevin Lane sprinted to the far side of the dale. He looked back yelling, "Be ready tomorrow, cause we're gonna get hitched." Chrissy Belle's father looked up in surprise, "Who's that? Goin' where? Chrissy Belle, are ya out there?"

"Yes, Paw, I'm just pickin' a few huckleberries to snack on."

"Well, I think it's time for bed, young lady."

The next night dressed in her best Sunday dress, she again stood eagerly waiting for her fair love. On his arrival she heard an unusual tap, for he had no rocks, but an old ladder of his grandpa's. "Hurry up Chrissy Belle, get cha some clothes and let's git." Grabbing a pair of faded jeans and an old flannel shirt, she slipped out the window of their love into the strong embrace of her gallant prince, "How we goin'?"

"In Grandpappy's old Ford!"

So off they rode under the florescent moon's glare. Kevin Lane drove roughly in and around the vast country's hills and curves. Chrissy Belle just sat confused and scared, knowing in her heart she loved the man that possessed her, now fearing the wrath of the man she left behind. These thoughts soon drifted out the window with the warm summer wind.

The road was clear with no traffic on the deserted country road. Suddenly from out of nowhere a curious 'possum wandered onto the road. Chrissy Belle screamed, "Kevin Lane, that 'possum, you're gonna hit..." Silence. Blood covered the front grill and bathed the road with leftover

fragments. "How could you?" she asked in rage.

"It was a accident. I didn't go to do it."

"Well, that 'possum could of had babies or somethin'," she said as a tear rolled down her face.

"Ah, honey, it'll be al'right. He's in 'possum heaven."

Reaching Mandlehill just across the county line, they searched the small town over for a friendly parson or J.P. The once-beautiful, starry night soon became cloudy with oncoming rain. The young couple hardly noticed the rain; slowly then more strongly falling as they finally reached the Justice of the Peace. Every limb was drenched as Chrissy Belle and Kevin Lane ran the fifty-yard dash from the truck to the porch. Stepping up to the front door Kevin Lane rapped nervously. The door creaked back slowly revealing a gray-haired, old man. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, sir. We'd like to git married."

"Well it's kind of late ain't it?"

"Yes, sir, we know, but we'd be much obliged if you'd just have a small weddin'. I've got ten dollars in my back pocket and five more in a bottle in the back of my truck."

"Well, come on in out of the rain."

"I do." The words rang through the still night air. It was over: they had been married, and their troubles were . . .

Back at Chrissy Belle's farm, Paw had been aroused by the coming storm. He decided to check in on his darling Chrissy Belle to make sure she was okay. Peeking through the cedar door he found his precious daughter gone, escaped, captured! Thoughts of her whereabouts ran wild through his mind. Grabbing his muzzle-loader he made off into the night to find his little girl and her captor. Down in his gut he knew it was that stinkin' ol' Kevin Lane from over the hill: his blood boiled at the thought.

The roads were slightly damp from the passing rain, yet it wasn't enough to wash away the stained blood that lay slick on the secluded road. Chrissy Belle's father's eyes swelled up with pain, this could not be. His only child hurt or maybe even dead was all he could think. Slightly stunned he stared with eyes of a raging Brahma bull. "If that no good, skunk smellin' jackass has harmed one hair upon her lovely head, I'll rang his neck like chicken for Sunday's chicken and dumplin' dinner." It was clear Kevin Lane and Chrissy Belle were in a heap of trouble.

Kevin Lane and his blushing bride rode back along the once-traveled path of love. Thinking life was grand, in spite of the beat up '49 Ford, they rode on closing in on a passerby. As they came upon the stranger, Chrissy Belle recognized his features. "It's Paw!"

Kevin Lane hearing just the sounds of that one word, maneuvered the truck into reverse. Skidding on the slick road, the ragged jalopy barreled with full speed into the nearby ditch, suspending it from further traction;

just like ol' Bessy when she got stuck down at the waterhole on the old Clankston farm.

Recognizing the couple, Paw raced to the wrecked vehicle; without the least hesitation, he abruptly grabbed Chrissy Belle from the truck. "What do ya think yer doin', Paw?"

"Takin' you back to the house where you belong!"

Feeling a swell in her heart she realized she must tell her father the truth. In a timid explanation she softly said, "But Paw, we're married."

"That don't matter none, you're still goin' home with me. And I forbid you to ever see that flea-bitin' Kevin Lane Hopkins again!"

Kevin Lane sat in the ol' Ford in lost desperation. Every fiber of his mortal being ached for his great loss. In a last attempt to assure Chrissy Belle of his love he cried out, "I'll come get you, Chrissy Belle!"

Two days passed and still no sign of her beloved husband or relief in her heart. In one last glimpse out the window of her room, she waits and searches by the full moon's glare. In the distance a figure "Could it be?" she questions herself. "Are my eyes mistaken?" Riding gallantly upon a sway-back grey mule Kevin Lane tromps in full force toward his bride. Screaming boastfully he exclaims, "I've come to get you as I said I would!"

She could see his masculine figure and something peeping out of his shirt pocket. Kevin Lane rode on up into the yard, but this time he didn't go to the window: he went straight to the front door, rapping on the cedar with one swift beat. The door quickly opened revealing Chrissy Belle's paw.

"I've come to get what's rightfully mine. I love Chrissy Belle and I'll be a good husband."

"You better get your ugly carcass offin' my property before I blow you to your Judgement Day!"

"Wait, let's make amends. I have in my pocket a deed to forty acres of good land across the holler. I'd be willin' to half this land with you and work it till it sprung up with a good harvest."

Lifting his head back to consider the proposal he glances over to Kevin Lane, then nods his head in agreement. With a relieved heart and a cool nervous hand, they shake in truce. Chrissy Belle flings herself into her lover's arms, knowing now she can forever be happy with the two men she loves.

Microcosm Award

The Message

Sarah Armstrong

Anna was scared. She could not understand what was happening, but she knew that there was reason to be afraid. China was her home. She had often heard talk of the far-away place called the United States, but she had never been there. To Anna the United States was the letter which her parents received each month from her grandmother in Mississippi. The United States was also the terrible monster who had stolen away each of her three older sisters as they reached college age.

The message had come an hour ago. Anna, of course, knew that the communists and Chinese were fighting. Even eight-year-old girls know what war is. She had not, however, felt that the war could ever touch her. The message had revealed that the war was coming into Anna's world. Although her parents had sent her out of the room, Anna hid behind the door and listened to the conversation. "But, John," Anna's mother exclaimed, "6:00 tomorrow. How can we ever get to the river by 6:00? I will have to pack, and what about the Chinese? We will upset them by leaving so quickly."

Anna's father answered in soothing tones, "No, we cannot leave so quickly. I do not understand the consul sending the message at this late hour. We will have to put our trust in God to deliver us."

From the conversation, Anna began to realize why she was scared. It seemed that an American gunboat would pick up the missionaries the next morning at 6:00 to take them to Shanghai and then, most likely, to the United States. Anna's thoughts were not those of her parents as they wondered how to travel the 15 miles to the river by the next morning. The thoughts racing through Anna's head were of her home. How could she leave the only home that she had ever known?

Anna walked out to the porch and leaned on the railing, taking in everything she saw. In later years, Anna would remember this part of that night with a sense of calmness. She began to remember different scenes from her life in China. She remembered the songs her Chinese amah had sung to her when she was sick with the chicken pox. She also remembered watching her father treat the Chinese who came to the hospital and the deep gratitude which they had shown to him. Anna remembered the happy times when all her sisters had been at home. She remembered the games which they had taught her and the stories they had told about life when the family had first come to China. Anna remembered the pain she had felt as one by one each of her sisters had grown up and left China to attend college.

"Anna, Anna, come here!" The calmness that Anna had momentarily felt was shattered by her mother's voice. Anna ran into the house screaming.

"Mama, what will happen to my silkworms? Who will feed them Mulberry leaves? And my amah, will she come? If she doesn't who will take

care of me?" The stream of words from Anna caught her parents by surprise.

"Now, Anna," said her father, "darling, calm down. We should have told you more about the message. We thought we could protect you, but I see that we were wrong. There was no way that you could not sense that something had happened."

"But Daddy, why do we have to leave? Why can't we stay here during the fighting? I'm scared, Daddy," Anna added more softly.

"Anna," her father stated, "if we stay we could be killed."

"Daddy, I would rather stay here and be killed than leave."

Her father answered, choosing his words carefully, "I understand your feelings. I must say that I agree with you, but the consul has ordered us to leave. We must obey the orders."

"Couldn't the consul have sent us the message yesterday? Then we would have had more time to prepare. I wish that I could say good-bye to the Chinese."

Anna's mother answered softly, "We all wish that, dear. The consul must have had problems getting the message through to us because of the fighting. If we went to the houses of the Chinese now, we would frighten them. We do not want to do that. We will have to hope that they realize how much we love them."

"Anna," her father said, "come here and sit in my lap. I need to talk to you. You know that the message says to be at the river by 6:00. We cannot be there by that time. I have talked to the other missionaries. We have decided that I will leave tonight and walk all night so that I can stop the ship."

Anna's eyes opened wider, "But, Daddy, the city gates are locked. How will you get out of the city?"

Her mother answered, "The other men will let your father down over the walls on a rope."

Her father continued, "Then in the morning when the gates open again at 6:00, you and your mother will leave with the others. I will have stopped the gunboat. We will get on it and go to Shanghai. Do you understand everything, Anna?"

"I do, Daddy, but I am still scared. What if something happens to you? Then you will not be able to stop the ship."

"Anna, I am scared too," he said. "We will have to take the chance that I will reach the river in time, but I have faith that I will succeed." They were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Oh, John," Anna's mother said with a calm but shaky voice, "the men are here. You must leave." The men came in with solemn faces. One was carrying a large American flag.

"John, you can use this flag to wave down the gunboat," the man said. "The soldiers will have no question as to who you are."

"Thank you, Bill. The flag will be of great help. Now, girls, give me a hug before I go." He hugged Anna and her mother and said with a smile, "Anna, take care of your mother. I shall see both of you tomorrow." Anna ran to the porch and watched her father until he was out of sight. When she went inside, her mother was crying. The tears were the first that she had shed since the message had come.

Her mother said through her tears, "Anna, you must go to bed now. Your bedtime was hours ago. Run upstairs and get ready for bed. Then I will tuck you in." Anna went upstairs slowly. Her mother came later with a calm face.

"You are all ready for bed. Anna, you are certainly a good girl. Now say your prayers."

When she had said her prayers, Anna whispered, "Mama, what about my silkworms? I don't want them to die."

"I will leave them downstairs tomorrow with a note for the servants. One of them will look after your silkworms. Everything will be all right."

"Thank you, Mama," said Anna, "and good night." Anna was very relieved about her pets. Somehow she began to feel that everything would be all right.

Anna did not sleep that night. She lay awake thinking about her father walking alone through the night. She also thought of the changes which were coming in her life. Most of all she thought about her life as she had always known it and wondered if life would ever be the same again.

Anna knew that her mother did not sleep that night either. She heard her mother's footsteps as she walked through the house going almost silently through each room. Anna listened as her mother packed some of their possessions in suitcases. Once Anna pretended to be asleep as her mother came quietly into the room. She stood for a long time looking at Anna.

The next morning at 5:00 Anna's mother came into the room. "Get up and get dressed. We must leave in an hour," she said pleasantly. The hour went by quickly for Anna. In what seemed like a few minutes, the other missionaries came to the door. As they left, Anna turned around. She held her mother's hand and walked backwards watching the house, her house, as long as it could be seen. Then she turned around and walked forward into her future.

Scholarship Award

Lidge

Pam Wallace

Lidge Fisher wasn't bad, he was just bad luck. Ma never would let us kids hang around with him. "He will just get you in a heap of trouble," she'd say.

Well, to me and Little Jess, Lidge was just about the grandest thing that ever came down the Pike. It didn't matter what time of day it was, if his car came down the road, all of the kids came to attention. You wanted to keep Lidge as your friend because he had a car. It was a 1967 Bonneville Pontiac. It didn't have a tail pipe and it used an awful lot of gas and oil but boy would it run when you put it on that little straight-away between Mrs. Maud's Store and the curve. Now in case you are wondering which curve, well if you lived around these parts you would just automatically know. It's the one by the Auty Pine, the one that Mrs. Aught Prine ran her 1934 Roadster into. Well to get back to Lidge and that car. When you live in the country the only place to go on Saturday night is to the crossroad, and to get there you just have to have a car, though I do remember one night when Otha Emerson came to the crossroad on his Pa's tractor. Anyway the crossroad is where the garbage dumpster for the county sits. There is a certain "element" in these parts that don't have anything better to do than to set garbage cans on fire. Me and Little Jess wouldn't dare do anything like that but let me tell you Lidge Fisher wouldn't think twice about it. Then he would go over to the gravel pit with the other "elements."

Lidge can't walk very well because of his only having the one leg. He shot it off when his wife left him. He's got an artificial one that the welfare gave to him but he says that it just don't look right. He never was a very good looker to start with. He never shaves and his hair is long and greasy. He has what folks around here call a "beer belly" and his shirt is usually dirty across that part of his anatomy.

Lidge kind of travels around eating off of first one and then the other until his welcome wears out. My maw used to feed him alot until he took up with Nell Orley. Maw said he was "shacking up" and that is when she told us not to be hanging around with him. All the harm that I could ever tell he did was to drink alot of black coffee and bum postage stamps. That boy could have the most to put in a mailbox and days that he didn't have anything to put in the box and raise the flag he always met the mailman to see what he brought. Maw always said he was sending off for girly magazines but me and Little Jess, we never saw that many magazines at his house. Maybe a few but that boy went to the mailbox everyday.

Lidge almost got killed that one time you know. My cousin Roy and him and maybe Nell Orley went all the way to Columbus partying. There are some pretty tall mountains in these parts and some pretty steep cliffs. One Sunday morning there was a helicopter flying around and the county

sheriff's car parked out by Red Bluff. Red Bluff got its name from the sheer red cliffs that go about 100 feet down. It seems that when Lidge and Roy were coming home from Columbus some time late Saturday night, Lidge had to stop on the side of the road because nature got to calling. Well when it is dark and the moon isn't shining you just can't tell where you are on a lonely country road. Lidge stepped out of the car and a clear load call of OH MY GOD was all that could be heard all the way down. They got him out though and flew him to Hazletown to the big hospital over there and said that he wasn't even hurt. Pa always told me that it was hard to kill a drunk fool.

Today Lidge doesn't live around here. Some people say that he went to New Orleans. But me and Little Jess, we know where he is because he sent me a letter. It had a picture of him and a real pretty girl standing in front of a big fine new car. He had a shave and a hair cut and even had his artificial leg on.

In the letter he said that he was doing fine in California enjoying all that money could buy because of that winning lottery ticket. I guess that must be where all of Maw's postage stamps went. You can't buy a lottery ticket in this state, you have to order them by mail.

Microcosm Award

Unfair

Dana Pennington

Michael stood on his balcony in the soft evening air, his face upturned as he gazed at the distant stars. Their cold brittle light turned the tear trickling down his cheek to crystal as they twinkled indifferently high above him, uncaring about his grief. The sounds of the eternal surf threatened to break the dam that held back all the painful emotions and memories of his wife he still hid from. It had been less than three months since the fateful day his wife had taken her small sailboat onto the bay, only to be drowned by the freak storm that had viciously caught and smashed the little craft. Her death had been so unnecessary, so unexpected, and just so unfair.

He hated the bay, he hated his lonely apartment, and he hated the city. He was going to pack his clothes and his typewriter, and he was going home; home to the country.

He walked through the woods he had grown up in, soaking in the serenity and calm that eased the lonely ache in his soul. It was autumn now, and the trees were taking on their most colorful clothes. He listened to the birds singing and watched the clouds sail lazily overhead. The slight breeze ruffled his hair and whispered soothingly, comfortingly, in his ear. He wondered where his uncle was. He was following his uncle's recently set out trap line. Then through the trees he saw a flash of his uncle's red shirt and simultaneously heard his sharp exclamation and then his triumphant laugh. He hurried toward him.

His uncle was leaning against a tree, gazing smilingly at his prize caught in his trap. Michael followed his gaze and saw at the far end of the stretched chain a silver she-wolf. She crouched down, her fangs bared angrily, her gold eyes glinting at the two men.

"Ha! Ha! Look, Michael! Just look at the she-devil. She thought she was smart, but I was smarter."

"I didn't know there were any wolves left in the woods. Have you been having wolf trouble?"

"Naw, I just happened on her tracks last winter. She had been keeping to the deep woods. I trapped her half-grown pups this past spring, but couldn't catch her. She was just too crafty and stayed too far away from me. But I got her now."

His uncle raised the rifle until it was level with the gold eyes. As if sensing her death was imminent, she crouched lower to the ground. The birds had stilled, and the breeze seemed to have caught its breath.

"But why?" Michael asked.

"Why? What do you mean, Why?!" his uncle exclaimed irritably. "Just because!"

The shot ripped through the bright morning, making everything seem suddenly over-bright and brittle. It echoed and re-echoed uselessly in his mind as a crystalline tear escaped his eye and trickled down his cheek.

Accidents Happen

Helen Armstrong

"Melissa," Sam said grimly, "your fight with Susan is set for this afternoon directly after school on Draftsman Road just like you wanted." Sam had expected her to be scared but she seemed simply preoccupied.

It was strange. Melissa had never been in a real fight before but she hadn't asked any of her more experienced friends for help. She had always before liked to be completely prepared for anything she was involved in, Sam puzzled to herself. Soon, though, her mind moved to more immediate problems.

There had been hatred between Melissa and Susan from the day that they had met. A never-ending quarrel had existed for years and now finally it would be settled.

Everyone from miles around came to watch the fight. It was freezing cold and both girls shook as they faced each other standing on a small patch of grass between the ditch and road.

"All of this will be settled right now," Melissa snarled.

"Now or never," Susan answered.

There was a short silence during which the crowd could see Melissa's eyes fastened on Susan's fists which kept clenching and unclenching over and over. Suddenly Melissa seemed to decide something. She straightened up and punched Susan in the jaw. Before anyone could really tell what was happening the two girls were on the ground fighting like dogs. Melissa ended up on top. She beat Susan's head obviously unaware of anything going on around her. This would have continued forever had not someone pulled Melissa off. The face on the ground was covered with blood and barely recognizable as Susan's. Her eyes were closed and her breathing was faint. Her breath made a strange noise as it came out of her mouth.

"Did Melissa really do that to her?" Sam wondered. She could only stand and stare at the form on the ground.

"I can't get her up!" someone screamed. "I think she needs a doctor." An ambulance was called and after it arrived Sam helped a shaken Melissa into the car and went straight to the hospital.

There they waited for about thirty minutes with Susan's parents. When the doctor arrived he was blunt and direct as he said, "She is dead, but it had nothing to do with the injuries she received during the fight. It was the grass that she was rolling in. Susan was highly allergic to this rare plant and once the seeds entered her lungs there was nothing anyone could do."

Susan's mother turned cold, accusing eyes toward Melissa and said, "Susan knew of this allergy and should have recognized that grass." Sam suddenly felt that for the first time in her life Melissa needed to be protected. She tore her away from that cold stare and took her home to the care of her parents.

It was many weeks before Sam saw Melissa again. Susan's death was obviously a freak accident and no one pressed any kind of charges. The rumors were that Melissa's parents had her in some kind of therapy which excused her from school.

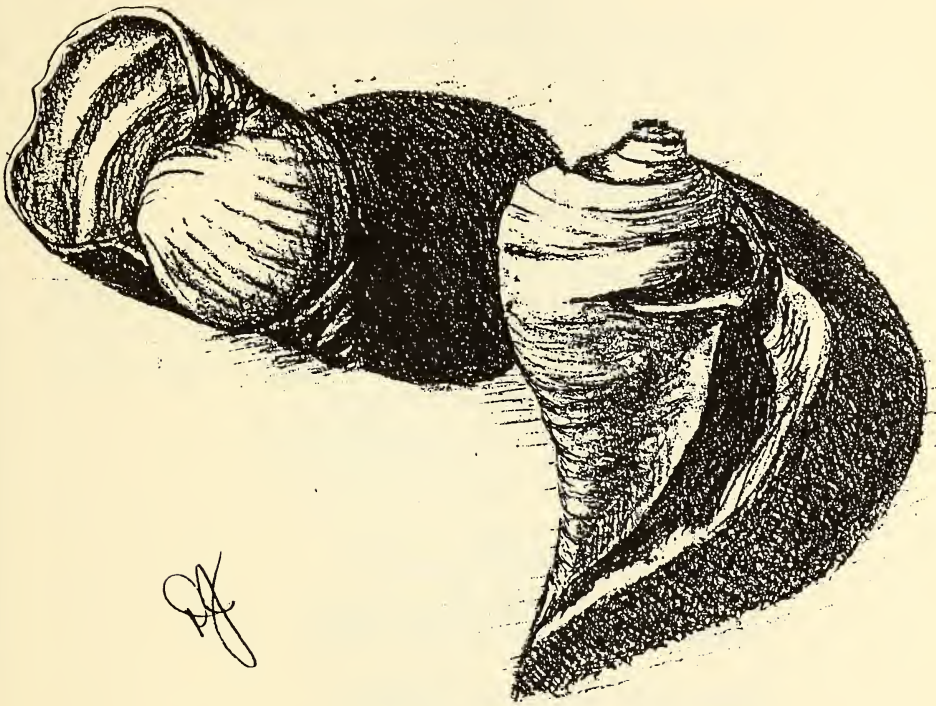
Then one day she showed up at Sam's front door with a wide grin on her face. "I just stopped by to return this book," she said cheerily. "I'm sorry I kept it so long. It was just so interesting."

"Don't worry about it," Sam answered with a puzzled look on her face. Melissa then excused herself and hurried home.

Once she was alone Sam examined the book. It was one of those Christmas presents people receive from practical relatives. Melissa had borrowed it long ago and Sam really didn't want it back. She thought she remembered it as being very boring but she flipped through to make sure. An underlined passage caught her eye. The page was worn and looked as if it had been read a hundred times. It read simply, "Aurora grass: a rare type of plant which may cause death to some individuals due to an allergic reaction."

Microcosm Award

Poetry



Debra Johnson

DEBRA JOHNSON

Song of Annie

Annie McIntyre

*I rejoice myself, and sing myself
for I am a fortunate child, drinking
in the sunlight, running and playing
in the rain letting the sweet drops
touch my face.*

*Everything I touch, smell, and taste
become a part of me.*

*Even my parents: he, who did not
father me, and she, who did not
birth me from her womb, gave me
more love and sensitivity than anyone could.*

*After a long day at school,
I'd walk into the house
and the great smells of Mother's
cooking enveloped me.
Happy to be home, I ran into the kitchen,
and there was Mother with this beautiful smile,
her eyes dancing: "Hi, love, how was your day?"*

*Father so strong and good,
working hard: I remember watching him
as he tilled the soil, his muscles
soaked with sweat glistening in the sunlight.*

*Even at night, wind blowing, darkness,
strange shadows, I was not afraid:
Father would take the time to tell me
great stories and my fears would disappear.
As small as I was I knew life
must have been hard for him
because he could not read or write, but still
I was proud of him for, you see, he was my hero.*

*I never forget the love and pride
they instilled in me.
Sometimes I say "Oh, to be that fortunate child again."*

Fairy Girl

Kim Weathersby

*That fairy of a girl flitting from tree to tree
Or gathering up violets or whistling to wrens
Waving and winding flowers into crowns and necklaces
And bracelets
How she could coax and catch butterflies and toads
Or hum harmony with the Mocking bird
Or make bushes into castles fair
Or stir brown water and purple petals to sweet nectar
Or sprinkle sunlight from her pockets like pixie dust
Or turn frogs into princes with a kiss*

Second Place, Microcosm

Feeling Blue

Amy White-Nations

*I miss you
I feel so blue
Sometimes the need
for you to hold me
is almost overwhelming
Today was one of those days
but I couldn't be with you
So I sat for hours
doing little
Then I came to my room
I went to sleep
and
dreamed we were together
When I woke up
I felt a little better
See, you help me
even when you aren't around
But I still miss you
and
feel blue*

Microcosm Award

Wounds of Absence

Anissa Flanigan

*Why do you have to leave?
I want you to stay.
You're like a wild butterfly;
I catch you for a moment
And then you are gone.
The love you give me
Is greater than the most
Beautiful snow-capped mountains.
My love for you is more
Powerful than the sun and rain
Forming the perfect everlasting rainbow.
So why must you go?
If so, my love will wait for you;
Until the end of time. . .
Until we meet again. . .*

Microcosm Award

Breakfast in the Field

Amy Williamson

*We arrive.
I pick the leaves,
gather dry twigs
for fire and tea.*

*You gather
the grain, water
from the brook,
form the bread.*

*Our hands bring together
the tea and bread.
This breakfast in the field
is all we have.*

Microcosm Award

On a Road

Amy Williamson

*A doe lies dead in the heat of the night,
Her limbs locked, frozen, jutting in air,
A vulture circles. Her bleeding eye
Is fixed and dulled to a cold blank stare.
So ends her life: a gentle grazing day,
A hard birth come spring, a night in rain.
Her buck, nearby, runs from the road, tail fanned.*

Microcosm Award

The Subway

Julie Ann Allen

*Sitting,
Staring straight ahead.
No one speaks.
No one smiles.*

*Loudly,
A voice comes over the intercom stating the next stop.
The train comes to a halt.
The people hurry from the door.*

*Quickly,
More people move in.
No one offers them a seat.
No one asks for one.*

*Suddenly,
Someone trips.
No one looks down.
No one reaches out to help.*

*Closing,
Passengers and train move mechanically forward.*

Scholarship Award

About the Shoes

Gloria L. Wall

*Around the corner
Through the door
Into the house
Down the hall
In the room
By the table
With the scarf
Under the bed
Among the junk
Within a box
Behind a jacket
Next to the wall
I found my tennis shoes.*

Microcosm Award

An Apple

Dawn Cothern

*Skin, crimson and shiny,
Bruised from its fateful fall,
Stem, weak from clinging,
Snapping, crunching abruptly,
Juicy, ripe, fruit ready to eat,
Worm, plump, looking very satisfied—
My appetite, completely ruined.*

Microcosm Award

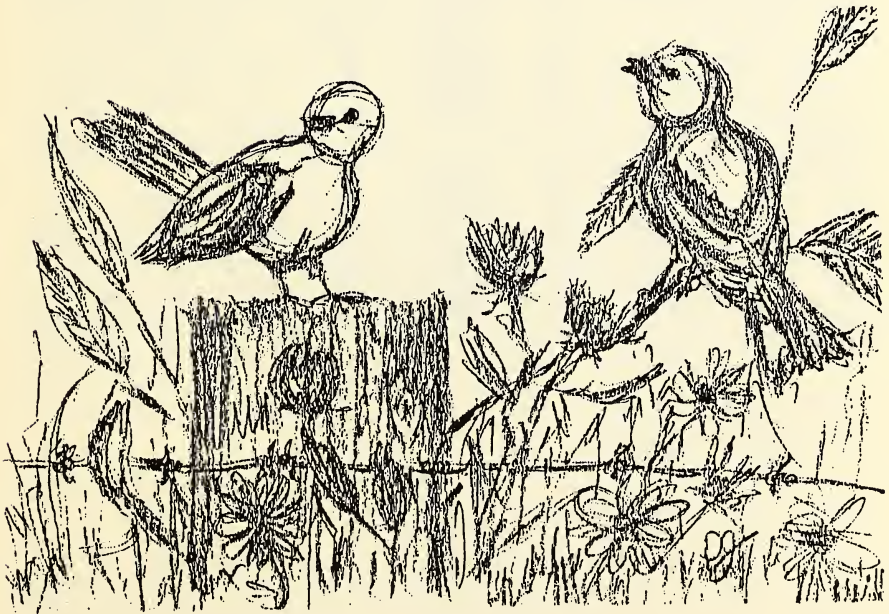
Hot Day With Banana Splits and Ice Cream Cones

Raymond Alexander

One hot summer day
The sun was out burning to stay
I ran down Bennett Street
Dancing and rapping to the beat
I saw the ice cream parlor
So naturally, I clutched a dollar
The man knew what I wanted
Pecans and peanuts (toasted) on
Top of a Banana Split.

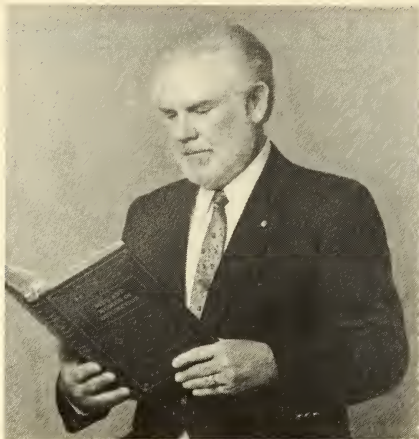
I pulled up a chair to jam to the hits
Wishing all things were like ice cream
And
Banana splits.

Microcosm Award



DEBRA JOHNSON

Copiah-Lincoln Literary Hall of Fame



The Late Dr. H. Hardy Perritt,
Sixth Inductee

The late Dr. Henry Hardy Perritt of Whitehouse, Texas, was born June 13, 1918, in Copiah County. He was the youngest of six children born to F. S. and Blanche Perritt. He graduated from Copiah-Lincoln High School in 1934 as valedictorian of his class; and in 1936, he graduated from Copiah-Lincoln Junior College. At Copiah-Lincoln, he excelled in academics and debate.

Dr. Perritt continued his education at LSU Teachers College and received a bachelor of arts degree in 1938 with majors in English and political science. That year he married Margaret Floyd and began his teaching career. Later he received a master of arts degree from LSU and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Florida.

During his lifetime, he maintained both a teaching career and a naval career. He served in the Navy during World War II, was on active duty during the Korean War, and was active in reserve status for thirty years, retiring with the rank of Commander. Dr. Perritt held teaching positions at LSU, The University of Virginia, University of Florida, and University of Alabama among other schools and colleges in the South and Southeast. In addition, as a consultant of education and communication, he held a Fulbright professorship in Brazil; a Health, Education and Welfare position with the Little Rock public schools; and an Office of Economic Opportunity position in Atlanta, Georgia.

His active teaching and naval reserve duties were augmented by extensive writing assignments. He was an author of a high school English textbook series, *Communicative Arts*. He was contributing author to *Oratory in the Old South 1828-1860* and *Antislavery and Disunion*. His Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Robert Barnwell Rhett—South Carolina Secession Spokesman* is on microfilm in the Library of Congress. He wrote numerous articles for professional journals on rhetoric, linguistics and cybernetics. He served as book review editor of the *Southern Speech Communication Journal* and president of the Southern Speech Communication Association.

Two children were born to Hardy and Margaret Perritt. Hank is a law professor at Villanova University, and Peggy is a systems analyst at St. Vincent's Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Dr. Perritt died June 12, 1986, the day before his sixty-eighth birthday.

This year the English Club is proud to induct into the Copiah-Lincoln Literary Hall of Fame Dr. H. Hardy Perritt, a dedicated college professor and humanitarian who contributed much through writing to his chosen professions.

Non-Fiction



SCOTT FALVEY

Granddaddy

In Loving Memory

Kim Weathersby

It was a ceramic clown figurine. The clown was round in his yellow suit and bald except for the fluff of grey around the sides of his head. He held what my mom called a "big mandolin," but it was probably a cello. This smiling clown was a musical figurine that played "You Are My Sunshine." My mother had looked for one of these for my grandmother for years. While walking through a store where she seldom shopped, she heard this tune mingled with those of other twirling figurines and bought it on impulse. "You Are My Sunshine" was my grandmother's favorite song. My granddaddy used to sing it to her, and he called her "Sunshine." The whole family loved the song.

It was November, and we were planning for Christmas. A few years ago it would have been a perfect gift for Grandmother, but Granddaddy passed away last year. We wondered if it would only make her cry, for it brought tears to our eyes. Especially my mom's.

The clown figurine very much resembled Granddaddy—round and bald. And happy. He used to love to tell us stories and jokes. We'd heard every joke at least ten times, but they were still funny the eleventh. And twelfth.

When I was a little girl, he used to play his mandolin and sing Italian songs. At fifteen he came over from the Old Country to support his family during the war. My uncle Joe-John, his older brother, had come, too. They worked for relatives who didn't pay much. Each week they sent every bit of their earnings to Sicily to feed hungry mouths. Oftentimes Uncle Joe-John and Granddaddy went hungry, too. One of Granddaddy's favorite stories was of the time he didn't send his wages home. He kept it all, went to the grocery store and bought a ham steak, some eggs, and loaf of bread. One of his cousins cooked it for him, and he ate it all. Didn't share it with anyone. That night he went to bed sucking on the round bone from the ham steak.

Granddaddy was a hard-working man. He owned a produce truck. From the time I was eighteen-months-old until I was six, we lived in Tennessee; and the rest of the family was in Mississippi. Grandmother and Granddaddy would come to visit us with the old brown station wagon loaded down with boxes of fruit and vegetables. We would sit downstairs in the den and snap beans and hull peas until our fingers were purple like the pea pods. When we moved back to Mississippi, we got to visit them more often. Granddaddy would still send us boxes of bananas, oranges and apples—whatever was in season. I was probably fifteen when I discovered kiwis. Granddaddy knew they were my favorite and always had them for me when I came to visit, and sent them to me when I didn't.

Sometimes you don't really remember things happening, but you've seen the pictures and heard the stories so often that you think you do. That's how I remember our trip to Biloxi with my grandparents. We have pictures of us girls—just Kellie and me, Kristi wasn't born yet—jumping off the diving board into the pool and Granddaddy's waiting arms. And pictures of Kellie sitting by Grandmother with her feet in Granddaddy's shoes.

There are so many good memories about Granddaddy. One year my cousin Bryan got a jambox for Christmas. Granddaddy, then seventy, lifted it onto his shoulder and danced around the room.

He used to get my sister Kristi's and my cousin Chrissy's names mixed up a lot, so he would call Kristi "Little Margaret," after my mom. Jason, another cousin, was always so full of energy, and Granddaddy would play with him and tease him. I remember he was always so proud of Melissa. She and Chrissy drew pictures for him. And Jennifer, the youngest grandchild. He used to call her his little Bumble Bee. She adored him.

Granddaddy learned to cook when he was in the army during WWII. One day the officer in charge decided he was going to cook. Granddaddy didn't know how, but he learned fast. It just sort of came natural. That's all he ever told us about the war. He always said that he would teach me to make spaghetti sauce, and Grandmother would teach me how to make the meatballs. We kept putting it off.

Some memories are hard to shake. For about a year after Granddaddy went to be with the Lord, everytime someone said the words "Lord Jesus" I thought of him. I could see him in the hospital bed, cancer in his bones. He didn't look like the music box clown then. Arms once strong and muscular from lifting crates of potatoes, cabbages and apples were thin and weak. When the pain was too agonizing to bear, he would cry out "Lord Jesus" in a voice that was not the one that used to tell us jokes. The cry was never in anger but only asking for mercy.

I woke up before 7:00 on a Saturday morning because the phone rang. Somehow I knew. A little later my mom opened my bedroom door and with tears on her face, told me that Granddaddy had gone to be with Jesus. I told her that I knew. And I went back to sleep.

Uncle John Robert had found him early that morning. He told us that Granddaddy had such a look of joy and peace on his face. There was a single teardrop coming from the corner of his eye. Uncle John Robert wiped it away with a Kleenex, and I believe that he still has it somewhere.

Just the day before, Daddy and I had gone to visit Granddaddy. I brought him a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He had a great devotion to the Mother of God; he used to say the rosary all along his truck route. His hospital bed was in the den, and that room didn't have her picture in it like his bedroom did. I thought he might like it because it was such a beautiful picture of her.

Granddaddy slept the whole time we were there. I kissed him on his forehead before we left. That was the last time I saw him alive. I wonder if he liked the picture?

Granddaddy's funeral was the best one I've ever been to. If you can say that about funerals. It was held in Saint Mary's church in Jackson. We always went to mass there when we went to visit, but I'd never once seen it full—not until that day. My mom and her sister, Aunt Carolyn, and her brothers, Uncle John Robert, Uncle Ricky, and Uncle Michael, and the sons-in-law Daddy and Uncle Bill were the pall-bearers. Aunt Kathy, Uncle Ricky's wife, stayed back to keep the babies. Jason, the tough little rascal, was crying. And Bryan,—he has such a big heart—he was crying, too. Bumble Bee just couldn't understand. I hadn't cried until I saw them.

On the way to the cemetery, we drove over a long bridge and then up a hill. We looked back and couldn't see an end to the cars with their lights on. There are a lot of people who love my granddaddy.

Almost a year later, I was traveling through eastern Oregon with a church team doing retreats. One day we visited a nursing home and did a program for them. We did a clown skit and then sang some songs. Kelly, one of our guitarists, played "You Are My Sunshine." I smiled as it reminded me of Grandmother and Granddaddy, and then was unable to control the tears that flooded my face as I realized the grief it must cause my grandmother to hear this song. I ducked into a restroom and sobbed, my tears turning white as they mixed with the clown make-up on my face.

Momma twisted the base of the figurine and held it in her hand for a moment, gazing at the clown that reminded her of her daddy, and I watched her as she slowly placed it on top of the television and listened to it turn out the familiar tune.

*You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
you make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine away.*

*The other night, dear, while I lay sleeping,
I dreamt I held you in my arms.
When I awoke, dear, I was mistaken,
And I hung my head and cried.*

*You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine away.*

First Place, Microcosm
First Place, MJCCWA

Hermit Hunting

James Paul McInnis

Camp John I. Hay is in the middle of nowhere eighteen miles west of Hazlehurst, MS on U.S. 28. And if you are not from Southwestern Mississippi, Hazlehurst is probably a nowhere place, too; no offense meant to the 5,000 or so people who live there. The camp was completed in 1961 under a grant from John I. Hay, a wealthy cargo merchant, who before his death in 1977 released all ownership to the Boys' Club of America. The camp, furnished with a lodge and kitchen, has three dorms sitting on 340 acres of prime Mississippi pine land with a forty-acre lake. And there is no shortage of Mississippi wildlife: bugs, ticks, snakes, armadillos, skunks, possums, raccoons, twenty-eight different types of fish, rats, squirrels, deer, turkey, rabbits, buzzards, woodpeckers, eagles, hawks, bobcats, panthers, hermits. . . Wait! "Hermits," you ask? Well, you will not find pictures in any Mississippi wildlife book, but that does not mean they do not exist. There is only one source of information concerning the hermit: the hundreds of young minds that have trampled Hermit Hill every Thursday night for the past twenty-five summers.

And there was hermit hunting. Nothing better to break the dull routine of the week than to take eighty screaming kids into the woods in the dead of dark night accompanied by six exhausted counselors. There were nine of us on staff. We couldn't always rely on the real hermit showing up so someone pulled hermit duty. Edgar, the very large ex-Copiah-Lincoln Junior College football player, would stay at his cabin along with all the kids who were just too scared to go. I sometimes wondered if perhaps Edgar was scared, too. But when I compared my size to his I didn't consider it profitable to mention that possibility to him. Chances are he was smarter than the rest of us.

"But, J.P.," you ask, "Isn't it dangerous to take that many kids into the woods in the dark?" Well, I always knew where they were and I didn't have to look far. It always amazed me that so many kids could hang on to a medium John I. Hay blue T. Well, actually it was an extra-large after the hunt. I kept up with my portion of the flock taking pride in the fact that I never lost a one, just pieces of them if you count teeth and countless flashlights.

Hermit hunting was my personal highpoint of the week. Hermit hunting offered me a chance to "get back" at the cruel and inhumane treatment that was inflicted upon my person and my mental stability. Psychologists would probably have a field day if they were to analyze this scare tactic, but the kids asked for it and cursed us if we refused to take them. So we obliged them with a HERMIT HUNT.

Camp Rule #404 states that you cannot start a hermit hunt unless there is mass confusion in front of Dorm #2. The rule further states that no one should have a clue to what is going on and it should take at least forty-five

minutes to figure out where all the kids are before we leave camp, who is going, who is staying, and who the hermits will be.

To add even more fun to the hunt, we employed an older kid to pull hermit duty also. And we had to collect all of the flashlights. No one but the counselors was allowed to have a light or lights. Boley, our fearless program director, would make sure we had taken an accurate count and then offer a few scare-comments about the Hermit. It would never fail that his comments would inspire a few more of the flock to run to Edgar, the good shepherd. And all the while, Edgar was busily shifting the burden by coaxing a few more to go on the hunt. The sub-clauses of Rule #404 prevented an even trade so we would have to recount the entire group again. Then after the boiling commotion and confusion had settled to a mild simmer, the hunt began. . . .

For an effective hermit hunt, you must make the hermit real to all of the kids and have them thoroughly convinced of his existence. This was not a hard task. All of the kids were from in and about the greater Jackson area. City kids; they would believe anything about country life. The camp is just an hour's drive on a bus away from home but it is a strange and sometimes frightening new world for those who have spent most of their young lives looking down at concrete and asphalt. Always in my tales of the Hermit, I liked to make Jason and Freddy Krueger look like Kaptain Kangaroo. I could give disinformation (I would never just plain out lie) to the kids with the straightest face. Not only did they believe the hermit was real, they also believed that I had single handedly killed all the trophy heads of caribou, antelope, wilderbeast, and other assorted four-legged creatures that hung on the wall of the lodge. In reality, these trophies were killed by Mr. Hay long before my birth. And being the consistent person that I am, I claimed all of the big fish, too.

The most successful night of the summer of '87 started on the lake road. After the initial confusion, I started my small group of twenty-two kids down the gravel road along the shore of the lake. It was a particularly dark night because of the cloud coverage. As we moved on down the road, I turned the lights off and on again after receiving numerous body punches of encouragement. At least half of the kids were clinging for their lives to my shirt. The other half, the would be know-it-alls and trouble makers, would run ahead a little or lag behind and jump from bushes to scare the others insuring that my shirt would get the maximum stretch. Near the bottom of the hill just in front of the archery range, a limb cracked overhead in a tree. I turned off the lights and the kids went bezerk. I immediately noticed the results as one of the tougher kids, reaching out in the darkness, started clinging for his life to a certain part of my immediate anatomy which I considered to be altogether important for my plans to produce future John I. Hay campers. The gripping pain prompted me to fluently express an intense

desire for him to let go of me. And this caused the hermit to almost kill himself as he fell out of the tree dying of laughter anyway. As I coped with the immense pain, this hermit revealed himself to be Garland, the counselor. The kids felt better; however, circumstances prevented my hunched over body from sharing their relief. Garland was still laughing, but he would pay later.

As my pain subsided, we headed on down the road. Most of the kids by then were wanting to go back. Rule #412: Counselors determine wants. They wanted to be scared and I was going to oblige them. Revenge pushed me on up the dark road. I felt bad about that feeling later on when I found out they actually cared about me. So, we took them on to the circle where we always gathered to tell stories of chainsaws, meathooks, knives, missing people, piles of bones, and all the Hermit lore we could fabricate at the moment.

We broke up the circle with a visit from the hermit. During this particular week, our main hermit was a kid named Johnny who was thirteen and definite about his plans to be a pro-wrestler. He was bigger than all of us and could shame Jessie Owens. So we took advantage of his size to bring a little more excitement to the lives of the youngsters. But in the long run, we realized that Johnny wasn't as effective as he should have been. Most of the kids caught on to the fact after a while that most real homicidal maniacs don't run around in Jams and Reeboks.

For the third and final act, we rounded up the flock beside the still waters in front of the pier. Sam began telling a story, making up everything as he went along, about a group of kids who were attacked by the hermit in the lake and how all were found except one. Sam then turned toward the lake and said with his best face and tone of truth, "What's that noise I hear?" The creature from the Black Lagoon, a kid named Thornton, wasn't paying attention so Sam said it louder with a much more appealing and convincing inflection, "What's that noise I hear over there by the third paddle boat?"

"I don't know, Sam," said I with the J.P.-straight-face. And with a Jim Fowler attitude I walked onto the pier and headed to the source of the noise. All the kids started screaming, "Don't go J.P." They were concerned for me. I went anyway and looked over the edge of the pier and waited for the show to start. The kids were so convinced that something was about to happen to me that none of them noticed me pull off my shoes in preparation for the finale. Thornton, concealed behind a hideous mask, jumped up with an entirely convincing roar and pulled me off the pier into the muddy waters of Lake John I. Hay. I fought and gasped and went down for the third time and then made my way under a paddle boat to hide. Garland came close behind with the intention of "saving" me. Later, I nominated Garland for best supporting actor. The scar he got on his side looked so real (Thornton grabbed

him before he was ready) and his coughing and gagging turned the older skeptics into believers.

By the closing of the scene all the kids thought Garland and I were dead. They were crying and Tommy was shouting as they left the bank, "We can't leave J.P., damn't. Someone go get him." He was beating on Wayne with his demands and trying his best to come find me. As I floated aimlessly in the water with Garland, I almost started to cry when I saw just how much these kids cared for us.

We climbed out of the water after the kids had left for the cabins and made our way to the lodge. I opened a can of Hawaiian Punch, filled a cup, and grabbed the government-stock unsalted peanuts. Garland went to dress his wounds and I sat down for a while to watch Letterman on the tube and tried to figure out exactly what these kids were scared of.

For some, maybe the hermit was real, but for others the center of the fear went much deeper. I thought about all the things I had learned from these kids throughout the week. Over half were from broken homes. In the nightly devotions I was slapped by the reality that most of the kids knew very little about church or God. I am just nineteen and many years short of a degree of any kind, so I will not argue with any child psychologist who would like to tell me that all of these fears are normal. Maybe the relationship that I thought I noticed between family life and the ability to cope with the hermit does not exist. Few could cope, but the exceptions left me with some faint feelings of hope. I can't forget the group from Capital Street Boys Club that huddled together on that dark path and started singing, "Sweet Jesus gonna keep me safe," or the day when we came so close to destruction when a tornado passed our way. Surely this was real fear, but that didn't stop ten-year-old Andy from getting on his knees and openly make an appeal to God to spare the group of kids and counselors heaped together on the bathroom floor. Nor did he resent his mates who laughed at him for this later.

My kids looked up to me and respected the things I said even if I did have to say them a hundred times. For a week of their young lives, I was their hero and babysitter. After my reign, they could go back to the Thundercats, G.I. Joe, wrestlers, movie stars, rock stars, and the rest of the "heroes" that offered the moral support they needed to make it in the world. My part of their education was over. I saw so many potentially bright minds for the future. One or two kids could curse in two different languages.

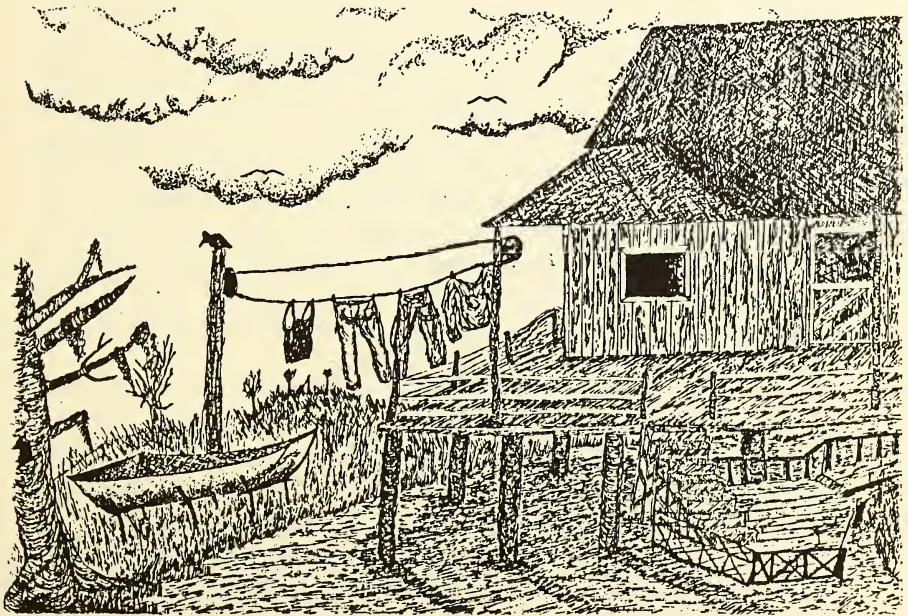
As the peanuts started to run low, I realized that the fear had shifted. I was worrying about the things they would have to face alone. Other hermits were facing them in the future and they wouldn't have the medium blue T to hang onto. How would they overcome him? God, let them recognize the Jams and the Reeboks. Help them to pull the mask and expose the fear for what it is. Don't let them fall to the ground and wait to be crushed. Please,

God, they're only kids.

I put the remaining peanuts in the refrigerator and then made my way back to the cabin. Tommy was there waiting up with the rest of the kids. He attacked me with a hug and then punched me in the side for fooling him. I sent his happy tired face to bed and then crashed.

I scanned each tired face as they climbed back onto the bus Friday afternoon. Many of them had left a large portion of their clothes in the cabins. Numerous bathing suits which no one would claim still hung on the nails on the cabin walls. I supposed that this was to make room for the memories they packed back to the city. Tommy came to me once again and gave me a big hug and asked me if I would be back next year. Boley had told me that Tommy had a rough go of it at home. I told him that I wasn't sure and he asked if he could be in my group if I came back. I gave him all my indefinite answers and sent him on his way, hurting within myself as I sensed the real fear that was greater than any hermit in the woods of Copiah County.

Second Place, *Microcosm*
Second Place,
Southern Literary Festival



TONYA CHERONI

Learning to Drive

Karen Yarbrough

The summer I learned to drive an eighteen wheeler was probably one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Not only did I master the operation of a very large vehicle, I also learned a couple of things about myself, as well. I discovered, for one thing, that my capabilities were not as limited as I once thought. Unfortunately, I also realized that my attitude about truck drivers, especially women truck drivers, was not very admirable. To put it bluntly, I was a snob.

It all began the year my husband decided to change professions and pursue his lifelong dream of driving a commercial truck. I was devastated. A person of my husband's caliber did not drive trucks or even associate with truck drivers! I had begun to suspect that he was losing his mind, but the day he suggested that I too learn to drive, I *knew* he had already lost it. Instead of sympathizing, however, I laughed in his face.

Jerry was patient with me, though. He believed that, if he could just get me to ride with him for a while, it would change my misconstrued opinion of truck drivers and the entire profession. He loved what he was doing and had no intention of quitting. Therefore, in an effort to save my marriage, I agreed to go with him for a few days. If I had known that "a few days" would turn into five weeks, I probably would never have agreed to go.

The first day out Jerry persuaded me to try, at least, to drive his truck. With the throttle control he could set the speed so that all I had to do was steer. The steering wheel was enormous and I felt like I was too far off the ground. I began to panic immediately, so Jerry took the wheel again after I had driven about a quarter of a mile. My panic turned into anger and I swore that I would leave him if he ever asked me to do that again. My anger had subsided, however, by the time we entered our first truckstop.

At first I was uncomfortable in the truckstops. I thought everyone was probably wondering what a woman like me was doing in a place like this. It didn't take long, though, for me to realize how wrong I was. With the exception of a few bad apples, these people were no different. They were just ordinary people trying to make an honest living.

My attitude about truckdrivers really began to change after meeting a few of them and discovering that I had misjudged them entirely. They were not the low class, unintelligent, trashy breed of people I had originally thought. They came from similar backgrounds as *myself*; they bathed regularly and a few even had college degrees. I met ex-schoolteachers who had decided they could earn more money by driving a truck. My biggest surprise came, however, when I began to meet the women who drove trucks.

I used to think women truckdrivers were very unusual women. I was convinced that they were all masculine type women who secretly wished to be men. Needless to say, I was wrong again. Most of them were very decent,

intelligent women who, like me, just wanted to be with their husbands. I talked to some of them at great length about driving and was very impressed with their accomplishment. Before the first week was up I began to think that maybe I too could learn to drive an eighteen wheeler.

For almost a month, from state to state, I sat on the passenger side and watched everything my husband did and asked many questions about trucking, which he patiently answered. Even the most ridiculous ones. I had not yet told him that I had changed my mind about learning to drive, but I'm sure that he sensed it anyway. He didn't try to pressure me. He knew I would let him know when I was ready to try it again.

It was on my first journey through the desert that I finally decided to try, once again, to drive the truck. Since I could see for miles around, and there was almost no traffic, I knew there would not be a better opportunity than this for me to start out. I wanted to start from the beginning so we didn't change seats while driving down the road this time. Jerry pulled over onto the shoulder and I slid into the driver's seat. I was very nervous as I shifted into each gear while pulling back onto the highway. By the time I had reached high gear, I realized I had gone through all ten of them without missing or grinding even one. (This was beginner's luck because, after that, I did a lot of missing and grinding.)

I should have relaxed a little after this but I couldn't. I now had to concentrate on holding this big monster on the road. After a few miles, though, I realized it really wasn't as difficult as it seemed at first. I finally did relax and actually drove for more than twenty miles that day. I was exhilarated and very proud of myself. I knew I still had a lot to learn about driving a truck, but my initial fears were gone and I was eager to go on to the next step.

Later, after taking my first road test for employment with a trucking firm, I realized I had accomplished a feat that I had thought was impossible. This realization made me determined to never again say that I can't do something without trying it first. I have also vowed to never again judge a person by his profession. I now have a lot of friends who are truckdrivers and they are all very wonderful people.

Microcosm Award

All in a Day's Work

Dawn Darby

Hi. I checked out your groceries at Sack and Save yesterday. It was a real joy. I appreciated all the cigarette smoke you blew in my face while I ran your stuff across the scanner. Sure, it's your right to smoke; I don't have a right to breathe. That one last LONG puff you let out right before you signed your name on the check really cleared my nostrils. Thanks from the bottom of my heart.

I'm really sorry I couldn't tell you how much the eight ounce Spanish olives were until I ran it through the scanner and got the price from the computer. You threw a fit about that, and I truly am sorry. We cashiers are supposed to know the prices on everything in the store when you bring your buggy full of groceries to our check-out stand. Even though there's a little white tag on the shelf under all the items that tells you the price, we're still supposed to be able to spit out all the prices at the snap of a finger, especially something so common as eight ounce Spanish olives.

You also fussed at me because the dog food went off sale this week. I'm really sorry about that, too; it's obvious that it terribly upset you to have to pay the regular price of twenty-five cents more. I tried to talk the manager into leaving the dog food on sale another week, and he said he appreciated my advice on the prices but that he just couldn't do it. Said he had to take the dog food off sale so he could put the cat food on sale. But anyway, it's still my fault that the dog food is not on sale anymore, and I'm still the one you should fuss at. My sincere apologies, and if the manager decides to ask for my advice on the prices, I'll be sure to tell him I think the dog food should go back on sale.

Gosh, I'm also terribly sorry that I couldn't cash the two-hundred dollar check from your cousin in Idaho. Yes ma'am, I know your cousin never had a check bounce before. See, I have a list right here of all the people in Idaho who have never had a check bounce, and your cousin's name is in the first column. But still, my manager said I can't cash it. But still again, I'm the one you should fuss at because I'm the one who made that rule at the last Sack and Save board meeting. Yes, I made the rule that says we can't cash two-party checks from Idaho even if the person's name is on the list for not ever having a check bounce.

Also, you were so upset that we were out of lemon-lime Bubblicious. You wouldn't settle for lemon-lime Hubba Bubba. Again, I'm the one you fussed at. Boy, you fussed at me good, too because your twelve-year-old son won't chew any kind of gum except lemon-lime Bubblicious and we didn't have any in stock. But you fussed at me rightly so, because it was definitely my fault. I'm supposed to check all the bubble gum racks before I go home and report any problems to my manager, and I forgot to do that yesterday before I went home after my ten-hour shift.

Well since we wouldn't cash the check from your cousin in Idaho, you

had to write a personal check to pay for your groceries. That really made you mad because now you only have seven more checks left, and it's all my fault. You got even more upset when I asked for your social security or a driver's license number. I would have been mad too; that's such a stupid rule. Nobody else ever asks you for your driver's license number when you write a check.

Gosh, you had such a bad day at the grocery store. I didn't know the price of eight ounce Spanish olives, the dog food went off sale, we couldn't cash the check from your cousin in Idaho, we were out of lemon-lime Bubbalicious, and you only have seven more checks left. And everything was my fault. I felt so bad. I apologized over and over but you just lit up another cigarette and complained about having to bag your own groceries. Then when I bagged them for you, you said I squashed your son's Cheerios and blew some more smoke in my face. I still thanked you, and asked you to come back. Oh, how I meant those words from the bottom of my heart. I sincerely hope you do come back, and that you come through my line again so that I can have another chance to better serve you. At Sack and Save, the customer ALWAYS comes first, especially well meaning customers like you. Why, without your thirty dollars worth of business every two weeks, my job could be jeopardized. I tossed and turned all last night—couldn't sleep because one of my customers at Sack and Save was not fully satisfied and pleased with my work. And everything was my fault.

Gosh, I hope you don't decide to buy your groceries at Kroger week after next; it would break my heart if you did. I'll be looking forward to seeing you again soon, and don't forget to bring your cigarettes.

*Microcosm Award
Honorable Mention,
Southern Literary Festival*

Bartleby Goes to Therapy

James Paul McInnis

No study of American literature can be considered complete until one has studied at least one of Herman Melville's great works. His characters, Captain Ahab, Billy Budd, and Pierre, are unforgettable. And, yet, there is another one that is just as unforgettable but perhaps the hardest to understand. What do we know about Bartleby, the scrivener? His very limited dialogue virtually dampens any hope that we may have of understanding his inner workings. What conclusions can we draw from "I would prefer not to?" It really doesn't say very much. Or maybe it does, perhaps a trained psychologist could unwrap that trite sentence and show us the inner realms of the mind of Bartleby. That is it. The answer that we have all been looking for. Bartleby needs to go to therapy.

"Ok. Let's see here. We have Bartleby — Bartleby; with no last name. So what seems to be your problem, Mr. Bartleby?"

"I would prefer not to say."

"Ok. If you don't talk, I will take this .357 and look at your brain from another viewpoint—the wall. Is that clear? Good. Now what was the question? Oh, yes. What seems to be bothering you?"

"Well, Sir, my name is Bartleby; Bartleby Hayes, and basically I think that I am O.K. The guys from the office made me come here."

"Well, there must be something wrong. I believe that I can see problems with this nasty little habit of yours to prefer not to do certain things. Why do you do that, Bartleby?"

"I would prefer not to say. But, actually, I am really not sure why I do that. I think that I have begun to see things or maybe all of life in general to be pointless at times. And therefore, my actually doing anything isn't going to make one bit of difference."

"Why does your life seem so meaningless? What are your accomplishments? Do you have any goals?"

"Well, I opened 356,000 dead letters at the Dead Letter Office in Washington. I read them all, too. I think that is a national record for any employee of that office. I don't think that I will receive recognition in Guinness' World Book of Records though. And, by no means, was it a goal of mine. Perhaps the letters are why I am here."

"Were the letters unpleasant, Bartleby?"

"Many were. There was money in some. That went into an account. But, I read the personal thoughts of thousands of people. Dead thoughts. Thoughts that were conceived but never born. Seeds of feeling, emotions, history, and life that could just not find any fertile grounds to grow upon within my mind. Dead thoughts, Sir."

"I see. But surely, Bartleby, some of those letters must have been happy letters with happy thoughts."

"Yes, happy. I remember happy. Fortunes won. Babies born. Jobs. Good crops. All the joy sent across the expanse of our land to the loved one for which the thoughts were conceived. The joy was never known. The letters were aborted in my mind. Lost. Gone forever. So pointless it seemed."

"Didn't you make any attempts to find the people that belonged with these thoughts?"

"Sir, did you listen to what I said? I said DEAD letter office. That means that all hope had been cancelled for finding the receivers. That's why they came to me. Oh, but I used to care. I walked home every evening thinking about all the people who didn't know that Grandpa had died during the trip out West or that a good job and land was waiting or poor Mary and her betrothed who found someone else or Johnny's long lost brother who wanted to be reconciled with his family. The list goes on and on. I used to care, Sir. I used to care."

"Why did you stop caring, Bartleby?"

"How many people do you care about, Sir? You have your family and friends. You know them. You see them. You feel their lives. Their emotions are your emotions by virtue of contact. Contact of all kinds. They in turn care for you. My 'friends' are ghosts of dead letters. All one dimensional. I don't see them. I can't feel for them because I don't know them. Thousands of them. Flat. No depth of character. Non-responding. Unaware of my existence or the fact that for a brief instance I am a friend who is concerned. Who cares. Brief. So brief. But, then I must move to the next one and stack him on top of an infinite pile as I am sure that you will probably do with me and my problems. As I learned in math, the end result of my stacking infinite flatness upon infinite flatness resulted in nothing. Nothing, Sir. I couldn't help them. Why should I care? What was the point?"

"So now you feel that your life has this same meaningless or futility? Do you want to continue living in this 'meaningless' world? If not, why did you react to my threat?"

"I don't know. I am confused. I want to live sometimes. That is why I left the old job. I wanted to find that new meaning. I wanted to respond once again. My boss now is nice enough. But, the job as a scrivener has driven me even further into this pit of futility. I look at a blank wall all day. I copy documents that will eventually amount to nothing. And I am again isolated from everyone. Copying and copying. What is the point? I want to run from all the futility, but where can I go? Where is that acceptance I am looking for? Where is the meaning? Why did God not finish the last few chapters of my life story? What should I do, Sir?"

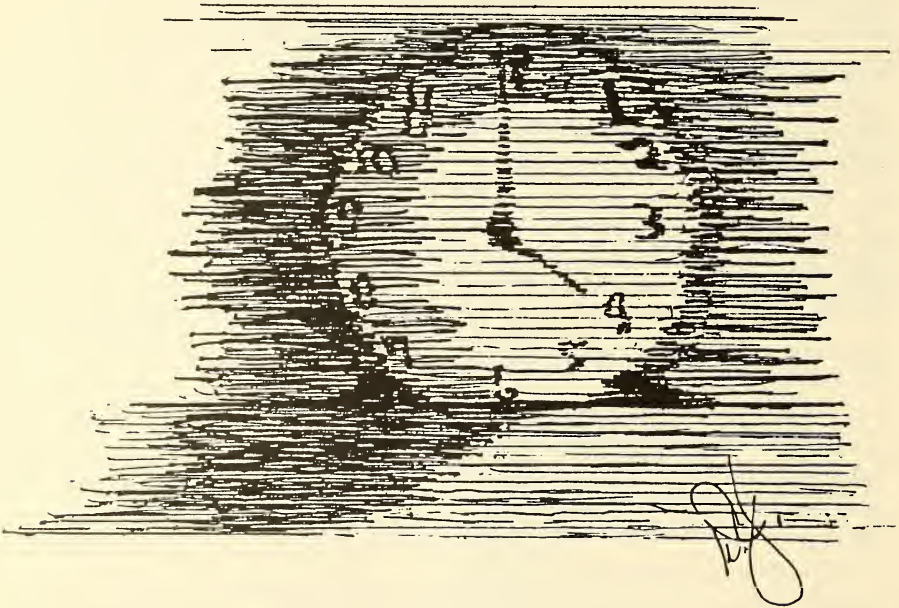
I don't know, Bartleby, but your fifty minutes is up. Nurse send in the next fl-, I mean patient."

"Thanks, Sir. You have been a great help. Maybe I can help you out sometime. The number is 1-800-HUMANITY. Wait for the tone and then

listen closely.”

So where were the mind doctors when we needed them? Could they have resurrected the mind of Bartleby? Or were we to still sit idle and whine to our teachers as many have for years, “Oh, I just don’t understand.” But, I must refuse to do that. “Bartleby” can be understood. There are thousands like him running aimlessly in our midst. All we have to do is just briefly take down our barriers of protection and come face to face with the wall of the world, that without the blanket of meaning and friends, is just as futile as the one Bartleby sees. Once exposed, we would know. We would die from social hypothermia. We would cry, “Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!”

First Place, *Microcosm*



DEBRA JOHNSON

A Trip to the Roof

Aimee Harris

I think there comes a time in each of our lives when we seem to be looking down from a tall building, trying to decide whether or not to jump. Whether we go up to that roof of uncertainty by ourselves or with a little help, or whether the time we spend there is a matter of minutes or years, there is one thing we can be certain of. If we go to the roof we will jump down. Philip Roth takes us all back to a rooftop we once knew in "The Conversion of the Jews."

In Roth's story, Oscar is a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy who does not have as much blind faith as his rabbi would like. He gets in trouble for asking questions that Rabbi Binder cannot, as a good Jew, answer. One day a frustrated Oscar blurts out, "You don't know? You don't know anything about God!" This leads the rabbi to bloody Ollie's nose. He escapes from the rabbi by running to the roof, and Rabbi Binder assumes he has gone too far, that Oscar wants to kill himself.

I can relate to Oscar's character because two years ago I was trying to decide if I wanted to convert from Baptist or Catholic. I found myself asking questions that no Baptist would want to answer but not quite brave enough to reject either of the two ways of life. I felt the same tugging at my soul that Oscar must have been feeling when he asks Rabbi Binder why, if God could make heaven and Earth in six days, couldn't he let a woman be pregnant without having intercourse.

As I learned about the Catholic religion I began to take things from both religions to heart. Not because someone said I should but because I believed it was the truth. This was purely scandalous. The Baptists called me traitor and the Catholics called me confused. Why can't God be everything? Why is He limited by people? And even though I was scared to go all one way or another I knew that I was in too deep to stop myself. I knew I had to jump, but I like Ollie jumped with certain conditions.

And although Oscar didn't plan to jump when he gets to the roof, he soon realizes that he has a choice to make. He has to decide why he is up there and what he is going to do about the situation. Like Oscar I had talked myself up to a roof, my only decision was which side to jump from. And if you consider for a moment a roof you have been on, you will understand when I say that once you are up there you must jump off; it defeats the purpose to take the stairs.

Oscar decides to resolve his conflict in an interesting way. He feels his people have underestimated God, and that he is being persecuted for it. So, while he has a command audience he makes them convert. All they have to say is that God could do anything, (including make a woman have a baby without intercourse) and that they wouldn't hit anyone for saying and believing that God could do anything. Then, of course, he would jump

down.

I decided to become Catholic, it wasn't easy, but it was a trip I had to take. I think Oscar's trip is one that we can all use as an example in our own lives. Philip Roth's analogy is universal whatever the conflict. We all make many trips to the roof and each time we do a decision is made. Each time we jump off, it is an affirmation of what we believe.

Microcosm Award



SCOTT FALVEY

My Truck

Allen Cooper

It was my birthday. I had finally reached the high point of my life. I bought a truck. I had worked all summer and saved \$700.00. I didn't care what kind of truck it was. I didn't care what model or color it was, just as long as it was a truck. I told my mom I would take anything that had four wheels and a motor. That's where I made the biggest mistake of my life. She found a truck that matched that description. She said it was a good deal and with a little work it would be a great first truck for an inexperienced, high-risk teenage driver.

It was a wreck. Even the man that sold it to us laughed and admitted that it was a hunk of junk. He said, "But it's got a good motor. I had the motor rebuilt right after the cement-mixer truck hit it. The odometer is broken, but its probably got 100,000 miles on it. The spare tire has a hole in it, and the speedometer won't register over five miles an hour and the steerin' wheel is loose, and as you can see that truck needs a bumper, headlights, taillights, windshield, and turn signals. It's got to have them things to make it legal for the roads. And by the way, you'll have to have a new seat causin' that one is all tore up. Also there ain't no heater, no muffler and no tailpipe."

My mom looked at the man and then at me and said, "It's a good deal and with a little work it will be a great first truck for an inexperienced high-risk teenage driver."

I gave the man my \$700.00 and climbed in the cab. My mom climbed in through the passenger window because the passenger door wouldn't open.

I started the rebuilt engine. The man laughed and said, "The dents and holes and year 'round air conditioner is free."

I looked around and couldn't find the switch for the air conditioner. "What air conditioner?" I asked.

Natural air conditionin', boy. The windows won't roll up."

The engine drowned out his laughter. The little Datsun sounded like a logging truck. I managed to get up enough speed to keep up with a fast paced jogger. My mom pointed to the left. A Mississippi Highway Patrolman had pulled up beside me and motioned for me to pull over. I did.

The six foot, four inch, two-hundred-twenty pound hulk patrolman said, "Guess you didn't see my lights."

"No, sir. I don't have any rear view mirrors, sir." I said.

"Guess you didn't hear my siren," he said.

"No, sir. The engine in my new truck is a little loud," I said.

He said, "Park that ugly, noisy thang 'fore I get real mad." I begged him to let me get it home and he said, "That's the ugliest truck I've ever seen."

My mom said, "But it's a good truck for an inexperienced high-risk teenage driver."

The patrolman gritted his big teeth and said, "I'll escort ya to the Crystal Springs exit 'cause I don't want that piece of junk parked on the side of the road in my territory. Let's go, hot rod."

The next day I had to borrow enough money to buy a tag, muffler, tailpipe, inspection sticker, taillights, bumpers, headlights, and windshield. And the most important thing of all, a stereo. Everyday I worked on my truck while my friends drove by in their vintage Mustangs, and brand new Broncos. I was humbled. The girls laughed, except for my girlfriend. She cried.

There are advantages of owning a hunk of junk. You don't have to worry about keeping it polished. Bondo won't polish. You don't care if you get a few extra dents in it because dents add to its character. You don't go crazy if cats come from all over the neighborhood to walk on the hood. My truck is great for hunting and fishing. And none of your friends ever want to drive it or borrow it.

My truck will never look any better, but then it won't ever look any worse. My truck isn't awesome, but it always get me where I want to go. Well, not always, but it beats walking and my truck keeps me humble. I used to be real cocky. I love my truck.

Scholarship Award

Today's Black America: Is the Dream Being Kept Alive?

Janee' Harrison

During the 1950's and 1960's Dr. Martin Luther King's eloquent pleas for racial justice won the support of millions of people both Black and White. Through his non-violent protests, boycotts, and his endless devotion to justice for all, he became the very symbol of Civil Rights. Dr. King had a dream that one day people would be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin and that equal opportunities would be experienced by all. Today this vision seems to be coming into focus.

More and more Black people than ever before are not only graduating from high school but also continuing their education in universities and colleges throughout the nation. Blacks are excelling in business at record breaking numbers. Chicago elected its first black mayor to two terms in office. Mississippi elected Mike Espy as representative for the 5th Congressional District, the first Black representative to come from that district since the Reconstruction era after the Civil War.

These aspects of Black America are truly outstanding, but these achievements don't overshadow the obstacles that face Black Americans today. Blacks are two and a half times as likely as Whites to be murder victims, and they finish last in practically every socio-economic measure from life expectancy to hypertension. Why?

In newspapers, magazines, and T.V. we are seeing more Black factory workers adding to unemployment rates as these factories go bankrupt. On the other hand due to such acts as Equal Employment Opportunity, employers are required to hire a proportional number of Black and White employees and true enough this act brings to mind this question: Would the employers have given the same Black applicants the same jobs if this act were not in place or if the quota had been reached? Even though more Black students are graduating from high school and college than ever before, often times the doors of employment are closed with such excuses as overqualification, underqualification, lack of experience and the old cliché: "Don't call us; we'll call you."

Gangs, drugs, and domestic quarrels are just three factors that are killing off Black Americans. Crime is two to three times more prevalent in the Black community than in the White. In Jackson, Mississippi, alone, fifty-two murders were committed in the year 1987. All but eight of these murders occurred in Black communities and were Black on Black. Statistics such as these are baffling the leaders of these communities and are scaring its citizens. In the area of murder it is as though we are our own worst enemy.

With difficult jobs and trying personal relationships, most Americans are finding it rather difficult to lead a stress-free life. This is especially true of

Black Americans who generally have to work twice as long as their White counterparts to receive recognition, promotions, and pay raises. Our cholesterol intake due in part to the consumption of pork and starchy foods tends to be higher than that of Whites. These elements contribute to hypertension, a leading killer among Blacks. It's the existence of diseases like hypertension, diabetes and cancer that make our life expectancy as a whole a little lower than that of Whites.

When asked if Dr. King's dream is indeed being kept alive the answer is part yes and part no. Yes, because today Black Americans are progressing in the worlds of business, education, and politics like never before. No, because we are still plagued with negative obstacles like racial injustices, unemployment, and disease to overcome. However, being a member of the Black community I am sure that we can improve on our positives and phase out our negatives to make this two-part answer one—yes, yes, yes the dream is indeed being kept alive!

Microcosm Award

Jeans in '88: Are We Ruining Them or What?

Kristina E. Jones

Fifty percent of all high school students are walking around in jeans that either look like they have been drowned in Clorox, shot and killed by an MX missile, or have "ring around the collar" all over various threads of the jeans. I mean, what is this? Is someone making us do it? Are we rebelling and taking it out on our jeans? Is it just one of those stages we will outgrow? No, it's none of these things. It is just the peer pressure of being in style. A fad, that's all it is. Oh, but yes, we are taking \$50.00 and \$60.00 jeans and either bleaching, cutting, or tie-dying them to their deaths. That's the three quick and simple methods to ruin jeans right before your eyes.

Bleaching? What's bleaching? All we are doing is making our jeans look a lot older than they really are by fading them. That's ironic because two or three years before now, we would not have been caught dead in jeans more than a couple of years old. That was definitely not the "in" thing. We are not only ruining our jeans; but worse than that, we're using up all of mom's Clorox. After a while of washing and wearing, the bleach eventually eats through the jeans which leads us to the second method of ruining jeans. The so-called "holey" jeans.

Cutting or making holes in jeans is one of the strangest fads we have ever gone through. I don't know why we do it, we just do. We either snip them with a pair of scissors, or just wait till the holes automatically wear into them due to "old age." Then to add a little bit of excitement, we wear boxer shorts or long johns under them just to add a touch of color and charisma. But what happens when all the excitement is over and this fad starts to die out? I'll tell you, we've ruined a good pair of jeans. There's not much you can do about the holes! So you keep the jeans and wear them just on Saturdays when you're not going anywhere. Call them your "cleaning house" jeans.

There is one more method, tie-dying. The tie-dying kind of goes along with the bleaching and the cutting. Think about it: you have to bleach them in order to tie-dye and if you bleach them well, then it's going to leave holes. Anyway, you take rubberbands and gather a part of the material and then you place the jeans in the bleach. When finished, it leaves dark blue rings floating all over various sections of the jeans. Here again, what's the purpose? I don't know, but you now have jeans lacking in color. That's also another pair of jeans down the tubes once the fad dies out.

It's true, these so-called fads are fun and exciting. And if you're lucky, why, you can have a pair that's been cut, bleached, and tie-dyed. But really all it's doing is wearing the jeans out twice as fast. So the next time you feel the urge to destroy a pair of expensive jeans, just remember to check your piggy bank. I don't think fads are that important, do you...?

Microcosm Award

Mindpower: Mississippi's Future

Mona Tanner

For years Mississippians were known for plowing the fields, picking cotton, and carrying logs. These tasks required "brawn," physical strength. Little mental ability was necessary for the success of these jobs. The old Mississippi depended on manpower to prosper because it was an agricultural state. Farmers made up the majority of Mississippi's population, therefore, education was not stressed. However, this era has been obliterated by time and technology. Mississippi's future now depends on mental strength, technology, scientists, and education.

If Mississippi is to continue to progress economically, it must utilize the mindpower of its youth by not only stressing and encouraging the youth to receive a thorough and complete education but by providing it. Power is thought of as a possession, or control; the ability to act or produce. The citizenry of Mississippi should take interest in the well-being and educational stability of Mississippi's youth. If the mental abilities of the youth can be cultivated into high standards with the desire to achieve in all areas, this state can be, and will be one of the greatest states in this nation.

Another change that must be made in Mississippi is technology. Mississippi is one of the lowest-ranked states in technology. This state has been overlooked or turned down for many technological projects that would have raised the economic and technological standards of the state. The super collider and NASA base projects are examples of this. One of the criteria for the selection of the site for these projects was educational standards. The employees of such projects usually possess exceptional mental ability and want their offspring to be exposed to the best educational background possible. Mississippi's weak educational systems are contrary to this. Technology is the future of the world as well as Mississippi. To lead in the nation's future, Mississippi must catch up in the present.

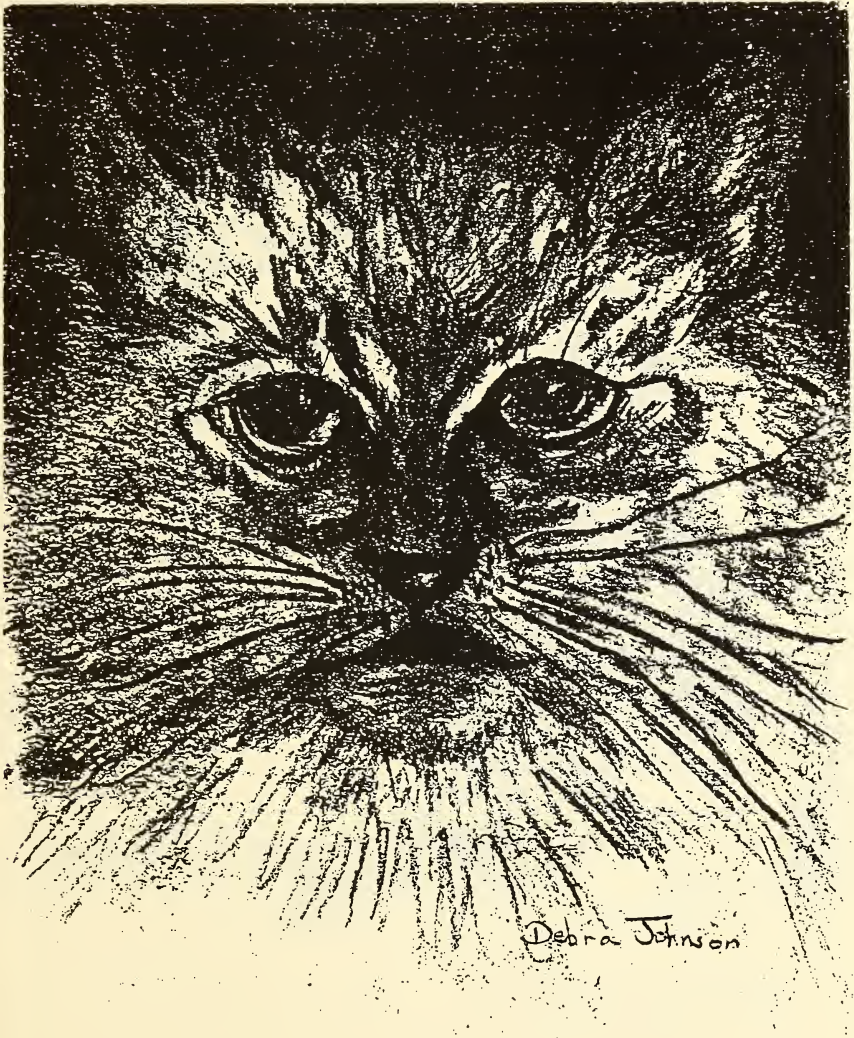
Also, Mississippi must begin to depend on its scientists for the future. The scientists and farmers of Mississippi must work together for the betterment of the state. This teamwork will greatly benefit the agricultural portion of the state. The farmers should report the problems to the scientists; and they, in turn, should research the problem to acquire an effective solution. This could greatly increase the agricultural production of the state.

Education is the "foundation" for all of these changes. Mindpower can be gained and utilized only through education. Technology is dependent upon education to advance and improve. Education provides technologists and scientists with existing knowledge which they are to build and add to through scientific research. High educational standards are the basis of all great states.

If Mississippi is to progress morally, technologically, and economically, it must replace brawn with brains, agriculture with technology, farmers with

scientists, and illiteracy with literacy. Essentially, Mississippi's future no longer depends on manpower but mindpower.

Scholarship Award

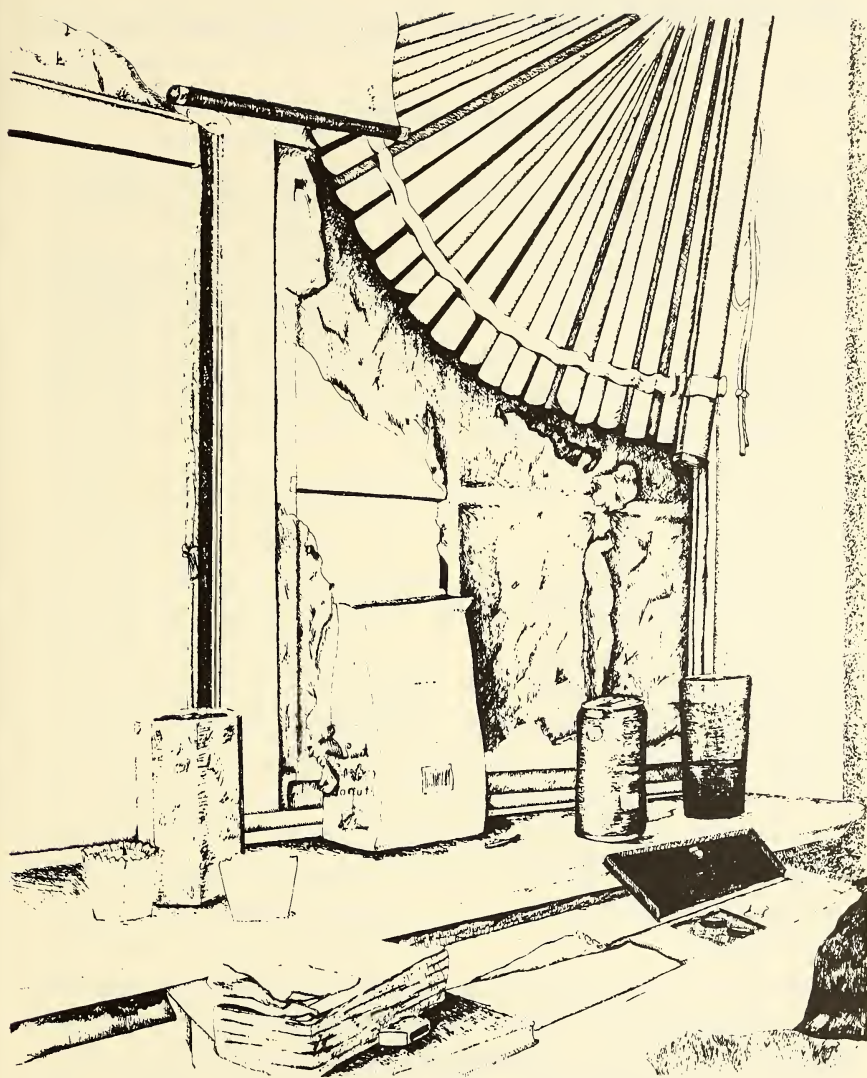


DEBRA JOHNSON



CHRISTY KILLINGSWORTH

Drama



SCOTT FALVEY

The J.P. American Literature Christmas Party

James Paul McInnis

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- | | |
|---|--|
| C. AUGUST DUPIN (typical clever detective) personified | PETER HOVENDEN (Cynical) |
| BARTLEBY (insanely quiet man, but he is still a refined | DR. RAPPACINNI
Overprotective father caught up in his perception of real needs. |
| ED (narrator of Edgar Allen Poe's "Ligiea" he is a deeply emotional individual. His emotional state is druglike.) | YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN |
| BOB (narrator of Melville's "Bartleby." He shows a great deal of emotional insight into the problem of humanity.) | ICHABOD CRANE |
| GIOVANNI GUSCANTI (A restless young romantic) | ROBIN |
| OWEN WARLAND (mild mannered genius) | |
| BEATRICE RAPPACCINNI (She is a mystical soul, but her personality is as beautiful as she is.) | |
| ANNIE HOVENDEN (Beautiful but naive) | J. PRESTON (the host) |

The author feels that the best interpretation of these characters will come from a close study of the short stories. Dr. Rappaccinni, Beatrice, and Giovanni are from Howthorne's "Rappaccinni's Daughter." Owen, Annie, and Peter are from his "Artist of the Beautiful." Robin is from his "My Kinsman Major Molineaux" and Young Goodman Brown is from his "Young Goodman Brown." Bob and Bartleby are from Melville's "Bartleby." Ed is from Poe's "Ligiea."

SETTING: The dining room in the house of J. Preston. A Christmas party is in progress. The house is in a quiet neighborhood of modern rural America. A fireplace centers the back wall. At stage left there is a sliding glass door leading to a back patio. The patio is surrounded by a two foot

brick wall and in the center is a barbeque grill. At stage right there is a six foot table decorated with the best of traditional party foods. A crystal punch bowl sits at the head of the table.

J. PRESTON (aside) While journeying along the road of American literature, I met some of the most interesting people. Some of them were very strange and some showed evil tendencies. Some were perfectly or maybe not so perfectly beautiful souls. They were all fighting some sort of personal battle. Many of them were deep individuals that you could spend years analyzing. They shared a lot of common traits in their struggles but they still maintained many differences. For the most part, I enjoyed their company down the road of enlightenment. So much so, that I invited them to my first annual J.P. American Literature Christmas Party. I will be a silent host and let them carry on as they see fit. But I will roam around the room and listen in on snippets of the different conversations. Without further ado, join me in the party.

C. AUGUSTE DUPIN: Good boy, would you hand me a glass of wine.

BARTLEBY: I would prefer not to.

DUPIN: (Taken aback by Bartleby's response) My. What troubles you, dear boy? Is there something wrong? Did I offend you somehow?
(Bartleby remains silent)

ED: (Is somewhat intoxicated on drink and opium and has regressed from his state of 19th century refinement to a typical modern day dope head.) Hey, Dupin, if you could figure out mysteries of the mind like you did with that purloined letter of Marie Roget, then maybe you could tell us what is going on inside the scrivener's twisted head.

DUPIN. Look who's calling the kettle black. It seems to me that you don't even know what the mystery is.

ED: What do you mean, Dupin?

DUPIN: You don't have a clue. They tell me you have seen your dead wife walking around in that morbid apartment of yours.

ED: So. What's wrong with being strange? It's not like I am the only person here who has done a few weird things. Look at Mr. Brown over there. They tell me that he went walking with the devil. And check out the hippie-looking Rip Van Winkle dude. They say he went to sleep in the woods for twenty years. And how about that Beatrice chic and her spaced-out dad, Rappaccini. They say he grows nothing but poisonous flowers. And I wouldn't shake hands with her either. Word has it from the Giovanni cat that she is really strange. But she is so beautiful. She reminds me of my Ligiea. My Ligiea. She was so beautiful. Her eyes were the window to my

universe. Her ears were the . . .

(J.P. walks away from the group as Ed continues to run on about Ligia. His voice eventually fades out in the background.)

J.P.: Oh, he does go on so about her. I think that I will leave before he starts describing the very essence of her toenails. Look over there. (pointing stage right) I believe that I see Giovanni Guasconti and Owen Warland.

(J. Preston walks across the room past the table where Ichabod Crane is busily engulfing food and drink and then makes his way toward Giovanni and Owen. He stands aside and lends a careful ear to the conversation.)

GIOVANNI: Tell me, Owen. Have you ever had a certain girl that you just couldn't get off your mind?

OWEN: Yes, I have. She dominated my mind for twenty years. I think I lived most of my life trying to impress her. I think she was maybe interested in me at one time but I let my life goal of creating the beautiful hold me away from her. And that is so funny because she was part of the reason I strived so hard to create the beautiful. But we do let beauty manipulate us, don't we?

GIOVANNI: I know where you're coming from on that point. But it was a little different for me. I didn't want to create the beautiful. I saw it and just wanted it. Wouldn't you agree that Rappiccini's daughter is quite beautiful?

OWEN: Indeed, I would say she is much like I would say about Annie.

GIOVANNI: Well, I have concluded that maybe that form of beauty is not all that it is made out to be. Let me tell you off hand (he lifts his scarred hand and waves it, demanding attention to his wound) that she was definitely more than I bargained for. She's terminal. And now so am I. She is beautiful, but she has poisoned my life.

OWEN: Is that true or what? I can definitely relate to that line of thought. Annie is so beautiful, too, but she poisoned my will to create. And it really wasn't that simple. When she was around me, I got so nervous that I couldn't concentrate, but then when she left, I couldn't get any work done either. I was so confused. I really wasn't sure what my life needed the most.

GIOVANNI: You know, I said Beatrice is evil and all of that but it is really her demented father who is evil. I know she poisoned my life and all, but it was her father who messed her up. I think that she is probably capable of more love than I will ever be able to show. I look for her to prove that one day.

OWEN: I had problems with a strange father, too. Look over there at Peter Hovenden, Annie's father. (nods stage left) Now he isn't bad weird like Rappiccini is, but that man has murderous effects upon the will. I believe that I

could have found more understanding from Annie if it had not been for the influence of her father. He had no faith in me and he still doesn't. Why, even after I created the beautiful, he still scorned at me and even laughed when his grandson, another generation of scorn, squashed it in his hands. GIOVANNI: (exasperated) Yeah. Love is one of those beautiful evil things.

J.P. (aside) I am a good host and will abide by my word, I will not speak to them. Instead, I will leave this analysis of love, beauty, and evil and only hope that they will make the right decisions. Oh, but look. (Looks stage left toward the patio) There is the beautiful Beatrice and the ever-more lovely Annie. I must go greet them. Perhaps they can enlighten me a little more about this affair which Giovanni and Owen spoke of. (He crosses stage and stands beside the sliding door trying to remain unnoticeable.)

BEATRICE: Annie, I need to talk to you. I have a personal problem that I hope you can help me with.

ANNIE: Let me guess. Men, right? Don't we all have problems with them?

BEATRICE: Yes, but I believe that perhaps this problem may be unlike any problem you have encountered before. Don't panic when I tell you this; I promise I am being careful, but I am poisonous. My touch, my breath even is fatal.

ANNIE: (taking a few steps back) What do you mean fatal?

BEATRICE: Please don't run from me. I have faced that all my life. But what I mean is fatal—deadly. My father made me this way. It's not really something that I am proud of. I know we all like to have looks that kill, but this went just a little too far. And now it is destroying my life. The whole world, which isn't very big for me, hates me. I suppose that Giovanni is my life within my small world. If it weren't for J.P. and his red suspenders, I wouldn't be making this appearance outside the walls of that dread garden.

ANNIE: But what happened that would make him hate you?

BEATRICE: I poisoned his life like mine is poisoned. But I love him. People say that I am evil but I am not. I know how to love but I can't show it veiled in a mask of death.

ANNIE: All of this is really hard for me to relate to. I don't think I can really comprehend what you really feel. I used to like Owen Warland a lot. When I was little, I used to think that he was so neat. He is a dreamer. My father didn't like him and convinced me that he would never go anywhere or accomplish anything. But, he was wrong and I suppose that I was, too. Owen created the most beautiful butterfly that I have ever seen. I really misread Owen. I guess I let my father push me the wrong way. He wanted the best for me, but maybe we should question what society considers the best.

(Beatrice departs the scene and goes stage right to mingle. Giovanni makes his way to the patio and sits on the brick wall opposite of where Annie is still standing.)

ANNIE: (looks up surprised) Hi, you must be Giovanni. Beatrice and I were just talking about you.

GIOVANNI: What did the witch have to say?

ANNIE: Aren't you being a little hard on her. You know, she really loves you. I can't believe that you are so insensitive.

GIOVANNI: Hey! How would you feel if you had been poisoned and sentenced to a life of isolation?

ANNIE: Well, now that you are poisoned along with her, you wouldn't have to be alone. You would have each other. She really needs someone badly. She is so sorry for what she has done to you. Can't you see that all she wants is real love and to be able to show it and share it.

GIOVANNI: Yes, perhaps I do see that. I mentioned that to Owen just a while ago. Which reminds me; where do you get off telling me to be sensitive to people's needs? Do you have any idea what you did to Owen? He really cared, and I think he still does, for you.

ANNIE: Yes. I do know that now. But I was like you in that I let the demands of normal (she puts emphasis upon "normal") society control me. I would change a lot of things if I could go back and do it all over.

J.P. (aside) It seems that they are coming around. Perhaps they will solve this matter before it goes any further. But I am still most curious about Hovenden and Rappaccinni. They do seem to be at the core of all of this. And look. (points toward center stage) I do believe that it is Mr. Hovenden and Dr. Rappaccinni. I haven't greeted them yet. Perhaps it is a good time to do so.

(J. Preston goes to center stage to greet the two men who are standing at the foot of the table.)

J.P.: Good evening, gentlemen. I hope you are enjoying this little affair of mine. I have just been mingling with your lovely daughter, Mr. Hovenden.

RAPPACCINI: Yes. We are having a rather enjoyable time. Oh, yes, and let me add that is a beauty of a daughter you have, Hovenden.

HOVENDEN: Thank you. And allow me to say the same thing of your daughter.

RAPPACCINI: I tell you, Hovenden. Kids today can be so dissapointing sometimes. You can devote your entire life's work to them and they try to throw it all away if given half a chance.

HOVENDEN: That is so true. But the key is not given them that half of a chance that they need. I kept tight reigns on my Annie. I know she thanks me now. She is so happy with her life and new husband and child. He is my joy. He takes after me.

RAPPACCINI: I am happy for you. And I agree one-hundred percent that you should contain your children and keep them away from the evils of the world. My Beatrice; she is an example the whole world should take note of. She is my life's work. I try to tend to her every need. I know what she wants and I always come through for her. As you say, I know she must appreciate all the things that I have done for her. I give her everything.

J.P.: (aside) Everything, I am really confused now. This doesn't help to clear matters up. This is certainly a distorted love triangle. Everybody seems to think they know what the other needs and yet they are so far off. They speak of meeting their daughter's needs and protecting them from evil. I must wonder about the real evil now. I think it is most certainly within them. But, I am a good host and I will not interfere.

(J.P. walks back around the table to the front of the fireplace where Ichabod Crane, Young Goodman Brown, Rip Van Winkle, Ed are gathered talking. Off to the right side in the background, Katrina Van Tassel and Brom Bones are talking. Brom Bones occasionally takes a swing at some of the other male guests.)

ICHABOD: I believe that my story must be the most interesting.

BROWN: Get a real clue. I WALKED down a road with the devil. Beat that, bean pole.

ED: That's nothing. My wife came back to life from the dead.

ICHABOD: Get out of her you dope head. We don't even think that you actually had a wife. You are too ugly. (speaking as though he were in contention for Mr. America)

RIP: Well, I still think that it is hard to beat sleeping for twenty years. I missed the Revolutionary War.

BROWN: So, my cousin Johnny missed the Revolutionary War, too.

RIP: Why? Did he sleep for twenty years?

BROWN: No, he went A.W.O.L. (They all roar with laughter)

J.P.: All of this seems to be so terribly dull. I can't get into this preoccupation with strange events that they have. It is getting late. I had better greet the rest of my guests. Let's see. There are Baglioni and Dupin. I think they are plotting an investigation into Rappaccini's doings. I will not involve myself with that. Oh, there are Bob and Robin. I haven't yet visited with them. (He walks back to stage left and silently joins the conversation in progress.)

ROBIN: I guess I do. For instance, a few months back my kinsman Major Molineux was tarred and feathered in a public place. In a way, I wanted to reach out to him and help him because he was my kinsman but I let the influence of the crowd overcome me and I found myself cheering along with them.

BOB: That's the dilemma I am facing now. I care a great deal for Bartleby, but people are beginning to talk about me for putting up with his act. But, I can't help it. I just naturally care for him almost like he were a son or was a part of me. I know that he doesn't have anyone else. But there again, sometimes I get so frustrated with him that I am tempted to send him away. What do you do?

ROBIN: I don't really know. I know that we should care more about people than we do sometimes. We let our fellow mankind struggle alone too often. I think that we must offer more individual attention to the needs of people.

BOB: Yes, we do all need each other especially. I should be even more tolerant and more supportive. It is the Christmas season.

J.P.: (aside) Yes. It is the Christmas season. Perhaps I should gather them to join in on a few Christmas carols. Maybe their eyes can be opened. They all seem to know to a certain degree what must be done to help their individual situations, but they inevitably refuse to take proper action. What a party. It seems that I have all of mankind represented right here in this room. Some are so detached from reality. Some are too caught up within their own problems to help meet the needs of others. And then it seems that others are constantly giving into the demands of the world and refusing to make any decisions for themselves. And some travel the dark roads of life. Yes, they define evil and good, love and hate, reality and fantasy.

(Now speaking aloud to his guest) Come, dear people, and let us gather together and sing and then be off, back between the covers of American literature where you can carry on your conversations for all of time to hear.

(Curtain as they move together.)

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